SIM ON CEREBUS!

#107

THE INDEPENDENT AND ICONOCLASTIC CREATOR OF THE AARDVARK IN AN OPEN AND EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH STEVE BISSETTE TALKS FOR THE FIRST TIME ABOUT WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE BEHIND-THE-SCENES WITH CEREBUS!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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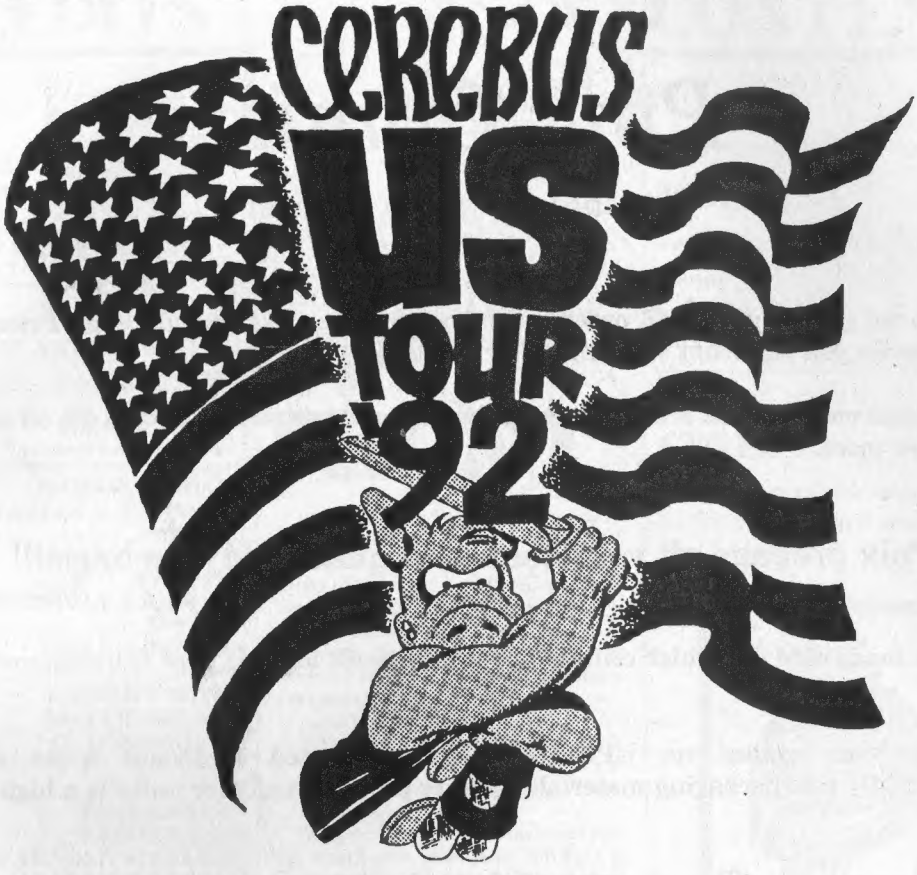

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UP FRONT

In the issues leading up to #100, I asked for responses to a survey about COMICS INTERVIEW magazine. To my delight, a deluge of constructive criticism and creative feedback resulted. A representative selection of those responses appears here:

Shorter Interviews with More Per Issue — or Fewer Subjects but Longer Interviews?

"I don't like shorter interviews."

"I like fewer subjects, longer interviews."

"Shorter with more? No, because if there are 10 interviews and I only like one of them . . . well, I won't buy it."

"I like the depth that can be achieved with the longer ones, more of an 'intimacy' is attained. If you have a bunch of short pieces, run 'em in one issue, with a longer piece to balance it out. This would provide a wide variety of views and comments, rather like being at a party, say, than at a quiet conversation as with the longer interviews."

"I'd rather see fewer subjects per issue, but longer, more in-depth interviews."

"Shorter interviews: No."

"On the subject of shorter/longer interviews, yes I'd like to see more of both. My view is obviously prejudiced by my liking for certain areas of the medium, but I think there's room for a balance of long and short pieces, depending on the subject (some great professionals don't give good interviews!)."

"I like the idea of one in-depth interview, broken down over two issues with smaller, related interviews accompanying the main one. Two-part interviews with big names are a great way to draw the occasional reader back for another month. Since comic buying is mostly force of habit it is a good way to get readers into the habit of purchasing CI."

"Would like both longer and more interviews — not necessarily long interviews in one issue, but split up, so there's always an interview starting and one ending in each issue."

"Interviews! As long as they're not one-page wonders, any size is fine."

Next: ***Why Do You Read COMICS INTERVIEW?***

-Dave

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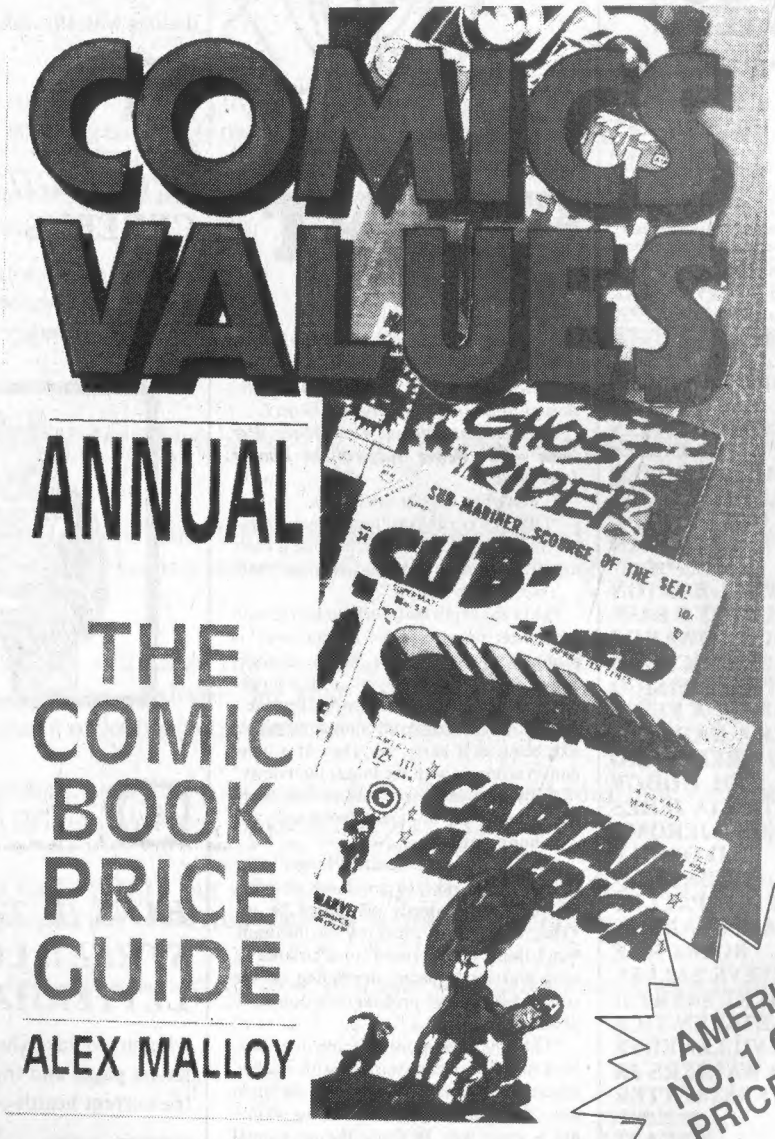

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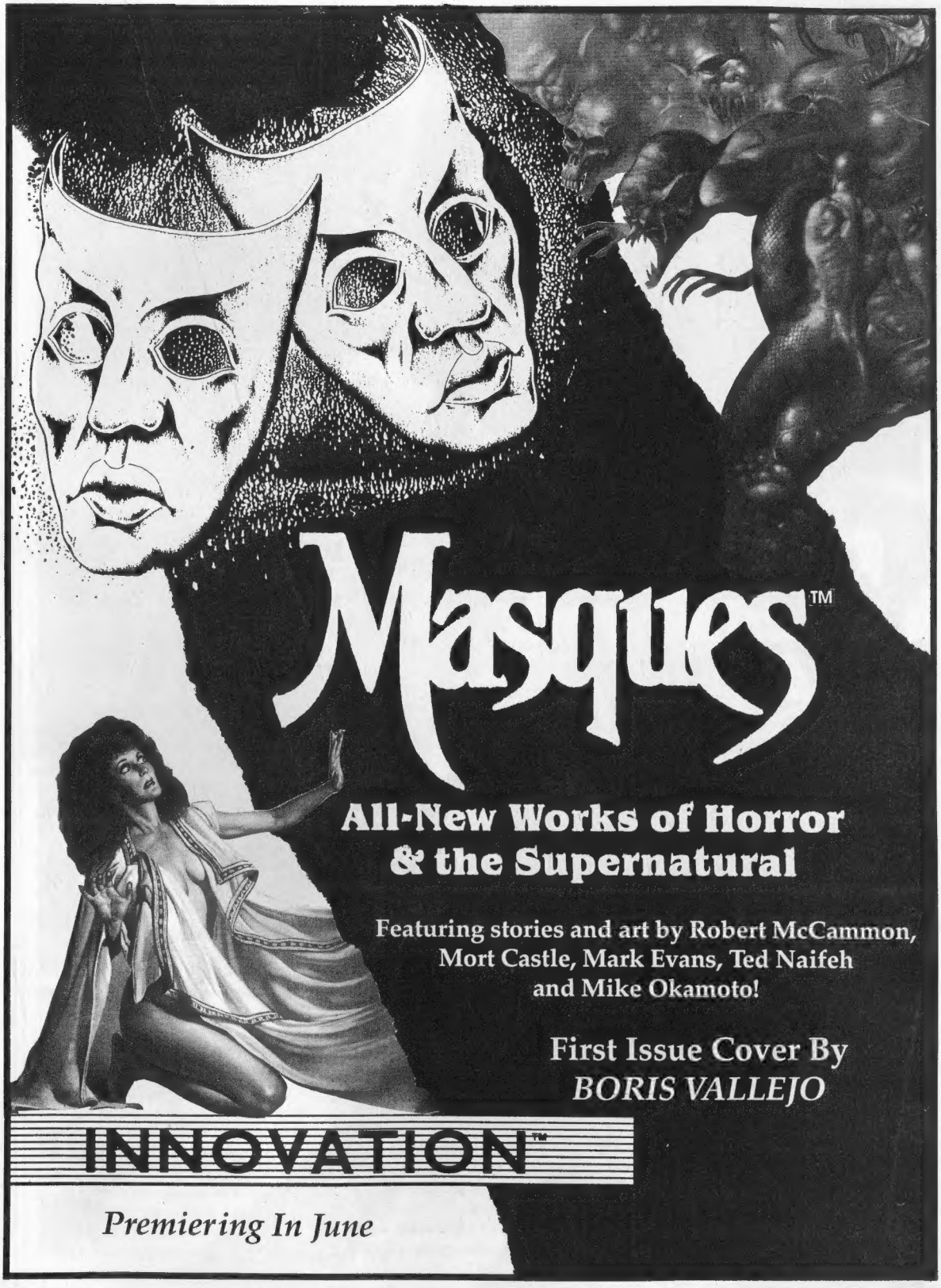
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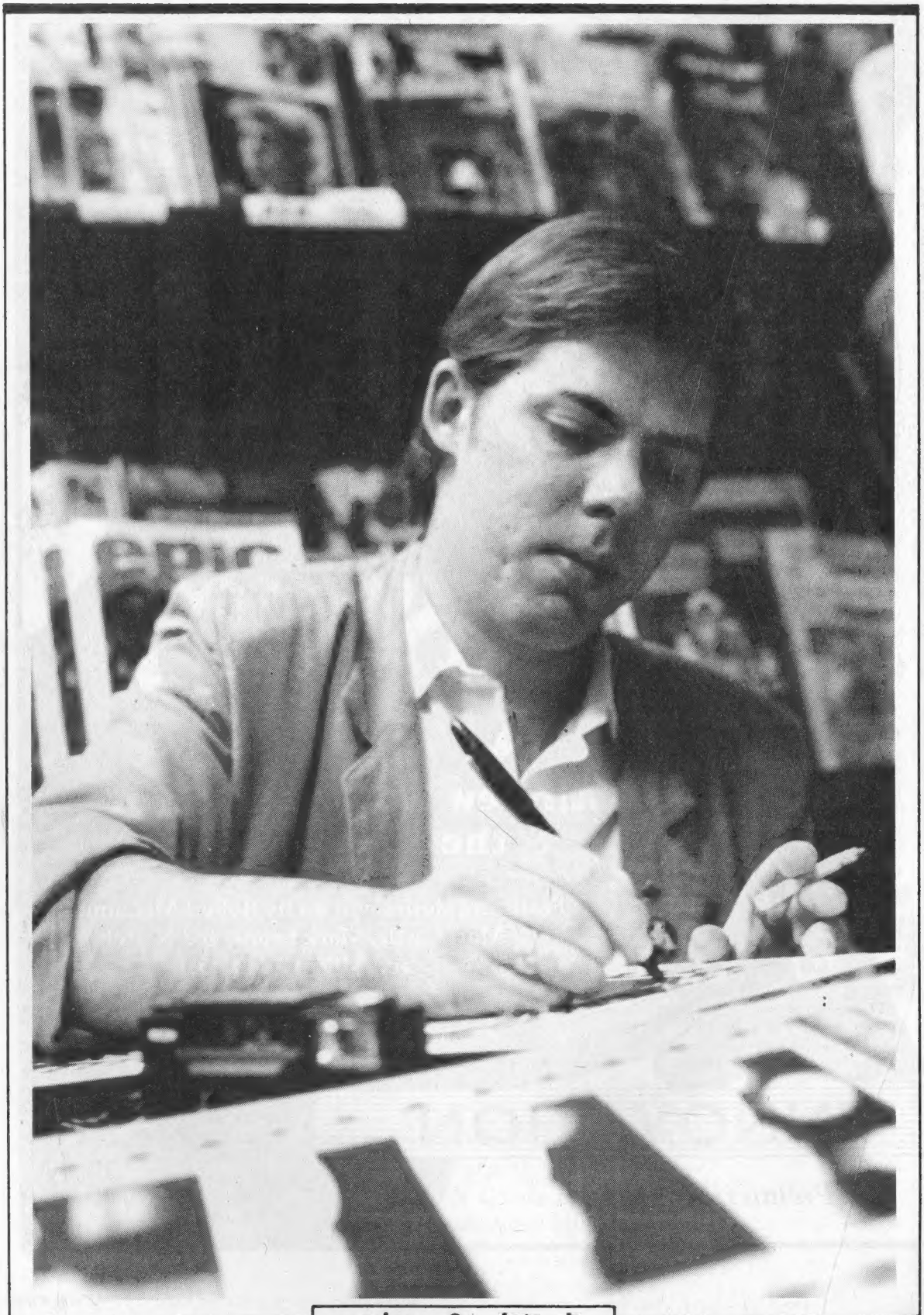
"One of the weirdest experiences is watching yourself



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Interview ©1992 Dave Sim/ S.R.Bissette

draw a page you've been thinking about for nine years."

CEREBUS

Too often in the comic-book medium, artists and writers go from one project to another, leaving the reader with a feeling of disconnected continuity. Not so with Dave Sim, who has made a life-long commitment to complete 300 issues detailing the life of his creation CEREBUS THE AARDVARK.

Conceived in 1977, Cerebus is a clever animal surrounded by both humans and monsters in a world of swords and sorcery. The strip, which the VILLAGE VOICE has called "the most ambitious project in the history of comics," parodies politics, religion, films, literature and even comic books with an acid-edged wit that leaves the reader laughing every time.

Sim, who was born in 1956, is a completely self-taught artist whose first comic-book experience was a local one-shot book called OKTOBERFEST COMICS, which commemorated the 1976 Oktoberfest Festival in Kitchener, Ontario. He went on to draw the weekly comic strip THE BEAVERS for Kitchener's daily newspaper, and worked as senior editor for ORB magazine in Toronto. In 1977 he drew two full comic books for independent publishers, PHANTACEA and REVOLT: 3000.

Sim recently completed the first 150+ CEREBUS issues. He has also been a well-known proponent of creator's rights and self-publishing . . .

STEVE BISSETTE: *Let's talk about CEREBUS, by God. Let's start with the most recent stuff, how about that? Because that's fresh in my mind. You just finished another novel, MELMOTH, and you ended it with such a mother-fucker epilogue, Dave . . . I don't know . . . This had to be the most explicit issue of CEREBUS you've ever done. It had to be.*

DAVE SIM: Yeah, I'd go along with that.

STEVE: *It doesn't bode well for MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.*

DAVE: In a way it does. It depends on what you call "boding well." I know what you mean.

STEVE: *I'm worried for your character's fictional lives, right now. Let's put it that way.*

DAVE: It's always difficult for me to see. That ending was in my mind pretty much from the end of CHURCH AND STATE on, so you're talking — what? — four years, three and a half years.

STEVE: *Okay, when you say something was in your mind, now this is what I want to talk about — the creative process you go through. You've been interviewed countless times and this stuff has never, to my knowledge, been discussed. So, you had a sequence in mind for four years . . . how vivid was that? Was that a goal for you when you started JAKA'S STORY?*

DAVE: Oh, yeah, JAKA'S STORY, the breaking-down-the-door part in issue #130 was vivid in my mind for a long time. This is one of the things in doing a 26-year storyline, obviously the longer you think about it, the more you have things up ahead that you want to get to. One of the great satisfactions and one of the weirdest experiences in doing this is exactly that situation, of sitting, watching yourself draw a page you've been thinking about for nine years.

STEVE: *When did that happen?*

DAVE: The ending on JAKA'S STORY, the ending on CHURCH AND STATE.

STEVE: *Those were clear in your mind for almost a decade?*

DAVE: Oh, yeah.

STEVE: *Wow!*

DAVE: I have very vivid parts at the end of MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS, along about the third or fourth year which have been vivid in my mind since '79. So at one point I will be drawing pages in MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS that I have been thinking about

"At this point I'd say it is a fully-formed

The first of many sketchbook drawings that Dave has provided especially for this interview.

for fourteen years.

STEVE: *I take it that you don't work with any kind of schematic plan to that?*

DAVE: No, no . . .

STEVE: *This is all retained in your imagination, until it gets down on the page . . .?*

DAVE: Yeah, and a lot of it gets modified once I get to the page. A lot of things that are very vivid in my mind don't actually work once I sit down and actually draw them the way that they have to be. You get it down on the page, and, wow, you're drawing, and you get a better idea of just how to do it. Astoria's trial. Close to the end of CHURCH AND STATE (issues #98, #99), that was about the closest to coming out exactly as I pictured it. With JAKA'S STORY, something that takes two years in doing, the ending was clear in my mind from the outset. The whole confrontation with Margaret Thatcher and breaking down the door, and that sort of thing. Once you get to the end of a 500-page story it's far more like a transcribing job than a writing job — it's just, "OK, with seven or eight issues to go, it's time to write the ending down; that's a hundred and sixty pages, let's see how many of them I've got." Once I write them all out in the notebook, you find out you have a hundred and seventy, so you have to cut ten of them. At that point you're not really writing anymore. You're not sitting there saying, "What should happen next?" It's just flat-out telling it.

STEVE: *Seeing as you are your own editor and your own publisher, when you get to that kind of potential dilemma, where you find that you are ten pages over what you need to be — why don't you just grant yourself those ten pages?*

DAVE: Oh, I do, a lot of the time. I did, in the case of CHURCH AND STATE. It sounded very funny . . .

STEVE: *With the double issues?*

DAVE: Yeah. Originally, with CHURCH AND STATE, once I realized that I was going for it, that I was not going to go back to doing single issues after HIGH SOCIETY — I've got another big story in mind which is the other half of HIGH SOCIETY — once I was embarked on that, the idea was, "OK, this will end somewhere around issue #100." And, then, I was looking through some back issues, some letter pages, and I was saying that CHURCH AND STATE runs through to issue #115, so basically I knew it wasn't going to go to issue #100, that it was going to go to issue #115, and ultimately ended up going to issue #111. So it's somewhat elastic. I leave as much space as I think I'm going to need. If I don't actually need it, then I cut it back. If I do need a little more space, I expand it. The only one I didn't do that with was HIGH SOCIETY, which probably should have been another ten or eleven issues longer, but people were freaking out as it was that there were twenty-five issues of him in a hotel. "This had better end soon. Please tell us that this is going to come to an end, and he is going to go back to being a barbarian." Since I knew he wasn't really going back to being a barbarian, about the least I could do was end it when I said I was going to — which

story, and it has been for about six years."

I wish I hadn't now, because certainly I wish I'd taken a lot more space with the Cerebus as prime minister and the campaign stuff.

STEVE: *What would you have done?*

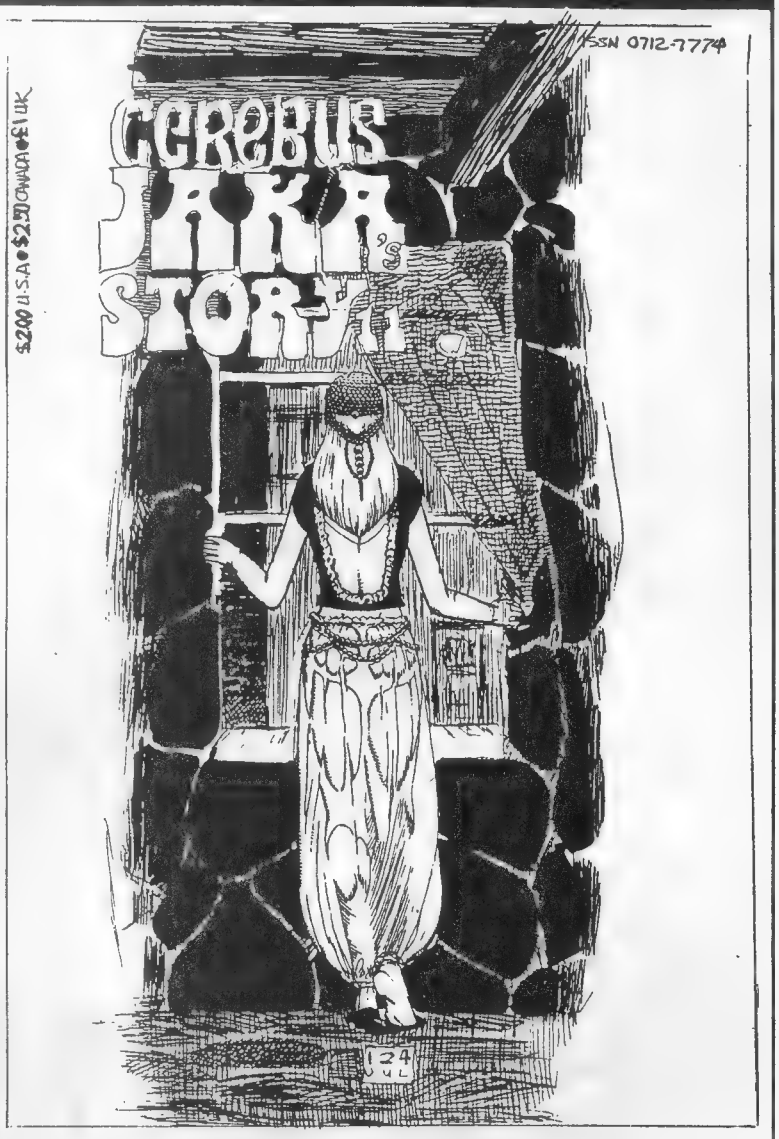
DAVE: Just more of what campaigns are like, of what governing is like. I'm always fascinated by biographies of political leaders, reading all of **Theodore White's** series THE MAKING OF THE PRESIDENT starting with the 1960 up through '72. The nature of what political campaigns are like, versus the portrayal of them. I could have had a lot of fun for a lot longer a period of time than I did. The campaign basically ran for three or four issues (#40, #41, #42). I was just starting to really enjoy it — and then it was done. It was time to make him Prime Minister, and he was only Prime Minister for seven issues, and still, everybody's squirming in their seats.

STEVE: *Given that hindsight, are you going to be responding to your readers squirming in their seats in the future?*

DAVE: No, no. Obviously, at the time that was . . . people forget . . . a lot of times even *I* forget how much of a risk HIGH SOCIETY was — how much it looked like somebody who had a good thing going was just sitting there committing slow suicide in front of his audience. I had no real notion at the time that that was what I was going to continue to do. It was like the next challenge. "I know that I can stay on a monthly schedule. Now I want to do a big story." And having done a big story, certainly while I was working on HIGH SOCIETY, the impression that I had was "This will be my big story in the middle of all these little stories." A lot like what **Neil Gaiman** has done with SANDMAN. What I thought I was going to do, was finish HIGH SOCIETY, then just do a number of "crowd pleasers," single issues, "Wow, that was really good, what happens next" sort of things.

STEVE: *That gets to some real nitty gritty, though. As a storyteller with that kind of hindsight — not just an artistic hindsight, but a commercial hindsight — a storyteller, in your mind, has to stay true to himself. From what you've just said, you're not going to worry much about your audience. What I draw from that is if Dave Sim satisfies Dave Sim, then that's the best CEREBUS can be.*

DAVE: Yeah. It is a story. I maybe haven't emphasized it as much as I should when I talk about the book. A lot of people really have the impression that I'm just sitting there at the drawing board going, "Well, what am I going to do this month?" Like, I've brought him this far, why not make him an astronaut? Or maybe he goes back in time and sees dinosaurs, or something like that. It's not that. At this point it is a fully-formed story and has been for easily the last six years, where I knew exactly where I was going up to about issue #200. In the last month or month and a half, the two conflicting directions, the two things that I was working on for the end of the story that I thought were conflicting, have finally resolved themselves. So, this is the first time that I know exactly where I am going all the way through to the end of it. Which is very different.



Preliminary layout sketch that led to the 124th cover.

STEVE: *It's amazing to me, too, how true you've stayed to the path that you've established for yourself, not only in a marketplace but in a culture that seems to make it a point to hinder any artist that pursues so stringent a path.*

DAVE: One of the big differences is that it is an ongoing story, so it does give you a certain, I wouldn't call it invulnerability (because certainly I've taken a lot of shots from critics that have caused damage in terms of the potential reader or the ambivalent reader), but it's very difficult to review something that isn't done. It's almost, as if, once they finish reading MELMOTH . . . what are you going to do, sit down and review the first half of a movie?

STEVE: *They will.*

DAVE: Yeah. They will, and they do, but

"The reaction is always an enormous surprise to me.

they end up reviewing something that isn't there. If you talk about CEREBUS to the end of JAKA'S STORY as if it's a finished thing, the review takes on a specific character, for example, **R. Fiore** saying, "Jaka always bogs the story down, so we can count on JAKA'S STORY being a real snore," as his final word on CHURCH AND STATE. They are sort of forced to review what they think the book is going to be like, at the same time that they review how the book is. There was the widely spread, widely believed impression that I was sick of Cerebus, that the reason Cerebus wasn't the central character or the forefront character in JAKA'S STORY or MELMOTH is that I was sick of the character, and I wanted to do other things. This was in one review and then gradually just became conventional wisdom about **Dave Sim.** "He's sick of Cerebus, so you can look to see Cerebus become a minor character."

STEVE: *And even though #150 was clear in your mind for quite awhile, the conventional wisdom is going to deem some sort of judgment on . . . I mean, #151 is almost like old home week, the beginning of MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.*

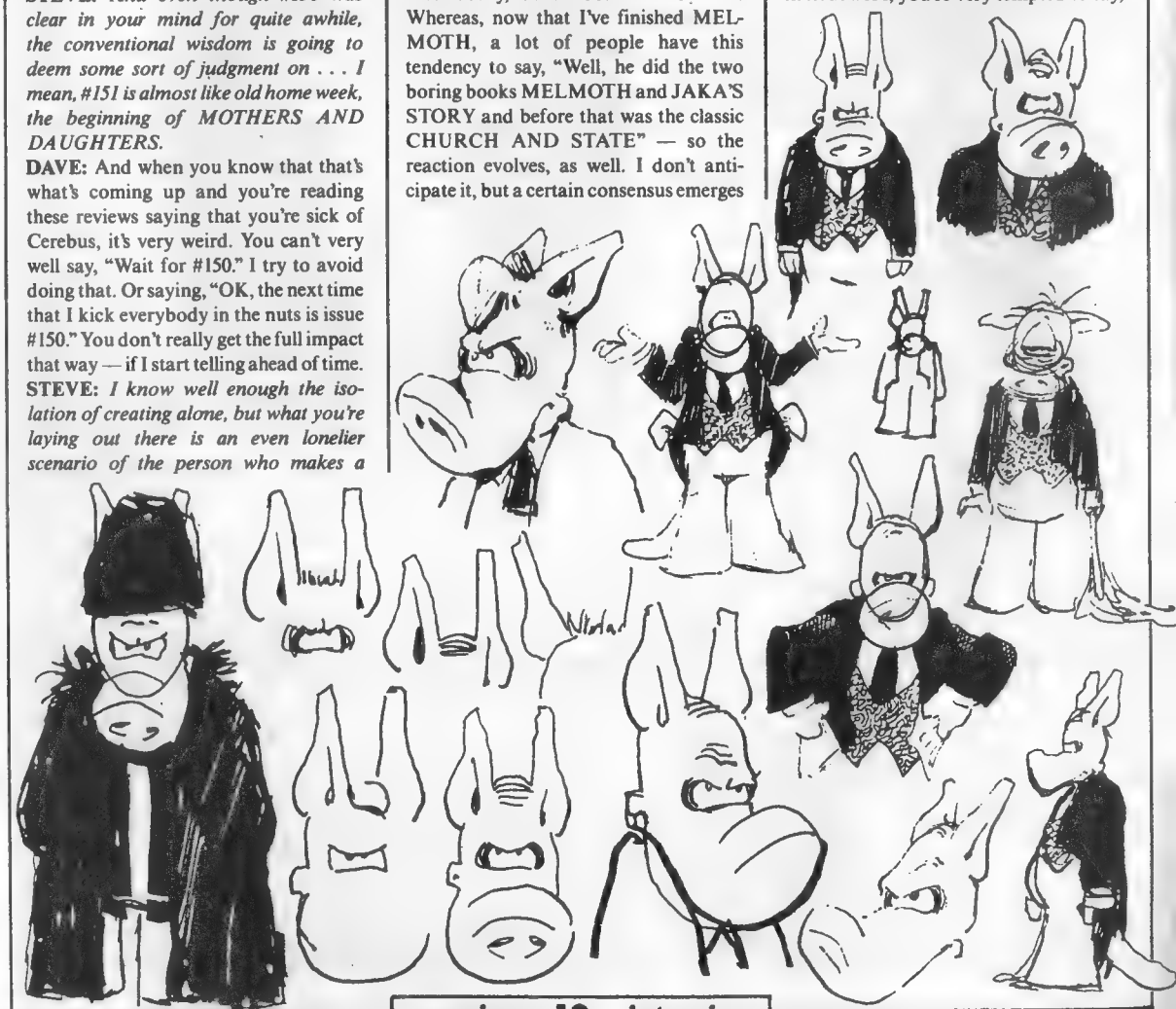
DAVE: And when you know that that's what's coming up and you're reading these reviews saying that you're sick of Cerebus, it's very weird. You can't very well say, "Wait for #150." I try to avoid doing that. Or saying, "OK, the next time that I kick everybody in the nuts is issue #150." You don't really get the full impact that way — if I start telling ahead of time.

STEVE: *I know well enough the isolation of creating alone, but what you're laying out there is an even lonelier scenario of the person who makes a living doing a grand novel that only comes out in episodic form. No one will ever know what you're up to! Does this mean there can never be any valid criticism for you from the critical community — until you're done?*

DAVE: One of the great joys for me is that I don't know what it looks like. I know what's going to happen, but I don't know the reaction. The reaction is always an enormous surprise to me. I'm always sort of guessing, trying to think "Well, how is this going to affect everybody, what is the reaction going to be to this?" I'm almost invariably wrong. I thought that CHURCH AND STATE was going to be the *ne plus ultra* of the CEREBUS storyline, and people would be raving about it, and that would give me time to do this really boring JAKA'S STORY. Whereas, three or four issues into JAKA'S STORY, everybody was saying, "Wow, this is really interesting. It's helped us to forget that philosophical monstrosity, CHURCH AND STATE. Whereas, now that I've finished MELMOTH, a lot of people have this tendency to say, "Well, he did the two boring books MELMOTH and JAKA'S STORY and before that was the classic CHURCH AND STATE" — so the reaction evolves, as well. I don't anticipate it, but a certain consensus emerges that is completely independent of me and certainly, to a large degree, independent of the opinion makers. Which is also independent of the audience. But, gradually, this becomes conventional wisdom until it changes.

STEVE: *Obviously, you can't fret over this kind of stuff?*

DAVE: No, well, you do. You obviously worry that maybe sometime there might come a really *severe* reaction; everybody-abandons-the-book-simultaneously-on-issue-#171. That issue was going to be a bit of a change of pace, a bit provocative or something, but it turns out to be the one thing they won't sit still for, and you didn't know it. It had become conventional wisdom prior to MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS that the CEREBUS volume — the first book — really had very little to do with the story; it was just where I did all my learning. The view that CEREBUS starts with HIGH SOCIETY. Knowing what I was going to do in issue #151, you're very tempted to say,



I'm always guessing. I'm almost invariably wrong."

"I wouldn't recommend that if you start reading CEREBUS, I would start at the beginning." Because certainly by the time people were done reading JAKA'S STORY and MELMOTH it's not difficult to see why they thought that, but of course I didn't anticipate that thought process.

STEVE: *Since we're discussing misconceptions, I've been up to visit you and Gerhard a number of times, so I've been privy to how you guys actually work. But, clearly, there is a great misconception as to how you and Gerhard work together. The constant nomination for Gerhard as best inker to me shows how little anyone grasps the process that you go through. Care to describe it for the folks out there who don't have a bloody notion as to how you guys do the book?*

DAVE: I pencil and ink the charcters and do the word balloons. The page that **Gerhard** gets has fully-rendered characters, all of the panel borders on, all of the dialogue that is going to be lettered in has been lettered in, and and then he pencils and inks the background behind it. I find it an infinitely preferable way to work, having done a few jobs where I inked someone else, and probably fewer

The first drawing of Cerebus as a comic-book character. It was sent, along with what would become CEREBUS #1, to Mike Friedrich as a proposal for QUACK, published by Friedrich's Star*Reach publications.

"People don't ink your pencils the way you picture them."

jobs where someone inked me. That to me always set both parties up for a disappointment. People don't ink your pencils the way you picture them being inked. And someone inking pencils will change them. You have to; you have your own personality. The nice thing about the way that Ger and I do it, is I get to finish my part exactly the way I want my part to be, and he gets to finish his part exactly the way he wants his to be. I don't, for the most part, suggest, "This should be here," or "I'd try for more of an effect here." He'll ask me from time to time, "OK, what are you driving at here?" or "What do you picture in behind this?" but, on a percentage basis, that will be one page out of a hundred and fifty. Aside from that, it's just — here it is: You do what you do. Sitting and telling **Gerhard** how to draw backgrounds, when I do not have that aptitude, seems really futile. And, as Ger says, he doesn't tell *me* how to pencil and ink the *characters,* so why would I tell him how to pencil and ink the backgrounds?

STEVE: *But it took you awhile to arrive at this kind of synthesis?*

DAVE: Oh, definitely. He started on issue #65, and the evolution was very slow; of picking what we do best and what works best. At first it was very grey, because I was still rendering very grey figures and doing a lot of rendering through the figures, and a lot of very fine lines. He was using sort of fatter lines, and a lot of lines, and not a lot of blacks. So neither of us was using blacks very much, and the overall effect was grey. Then you can see us sort of jockeying for position back and forth, and I've moved my drawing to an extreme black and white complement, either 60% black or 60% white. He's almost across the board, picked between a 60-100% black, so that it always snaps forward whatever it is that I am doing. One of the things with somebody who's as meticulous and as brilliant at rendering as **Gerhard** is, is that they tend to avoid solid black (thinking of it as a short cut); why put an area of solid black in there when I can put eight thousand cross-hatched lines? He's obviously learned just how much you can get with areas of solid black. It doesn't matter where you put them. You can spend five hours cross-hatching that area or go in with a roller. And if it looks better going in with a roller, do that.

STEVE: *I first noticed this with the issues set on the moon, issues #105-#111, where the covers work as both illustration and iconography.*

DAVE: Well, that's kind of unavoidable,

Various lettering designs — along with: ACDIMORSTV.

you can't even see stars and whatnot, it's a complete void. One of those things that's very helpful doing the book monthly is that he's always doing the next page, so it's an accumulation. The more you draw the more you pick up on what works really well.

STEVE: *There's another thing I wanted to ask since we are talking about the visual collaboration between the two of you. It seems to me that the covers took a real leap forward and they've stayed right there since the beginning of JAKA'S STORY. Certainly your covers were always striking and from issue #100 on they were very powerful and direct with their design, but there's a real synthesis from #114 on that you guys have maintained. How do you approach doing your covers, from idea through layout and on?*

DAVE: I've never really felt that I had an aptitude for it, to be really honest. It's nice to hear you say that.

STEVE: *Notice that I said it was after Ger and you were really cooking.*

Promotional art "print" handed out to fans waiting in line to attend TorontoCon in February, 1978, where Deni and Dave Sim debuted CEREBUS #2.

"There's more time spent on the covers than anything else."

DAVE: Well, even then. It's very funny, there are so many covers that we get done and we think that, well, we'll just have to live with it. I don't like it, you don't like it, but I spent too much time on it and now you are spending too much time on it. We've got a whole issue to draw. I think there's more time spent on the covers than just about anything else and a lot of times there's a feeling on both of our parts that for the amount of time that we put into it we didn't get full value out of it. Usually, the reaction is much better from out there than *our* reaction is. We do have a certain number that we like. Most of the time Ger likes what I did on it and I think it sucks. In the last while a lot of the reason there haven't been people on the covers, it's like "Take it away, Ger"; let **Gerhard** do the cover. Just make it all background so I'll like this one — because I hate what I do on them. I'll give you a good example: During JAKA'S STORY the cover where Pud is crouching down and watching Oscar and Rick through the window and you can see the reflection of Oscar and Rick on the window and you can also see Pud looking out through it, which is a very complicated sort of thing to draw. You are talking about a brilliant sunshine reflection so it has to look, literally, like a painting on top of a painting. All I have to do is draw a very large Pud head and a little tiny Oscar and a little tiny Rick and after that it's just one big series of reflection problems for **Gerhard.**

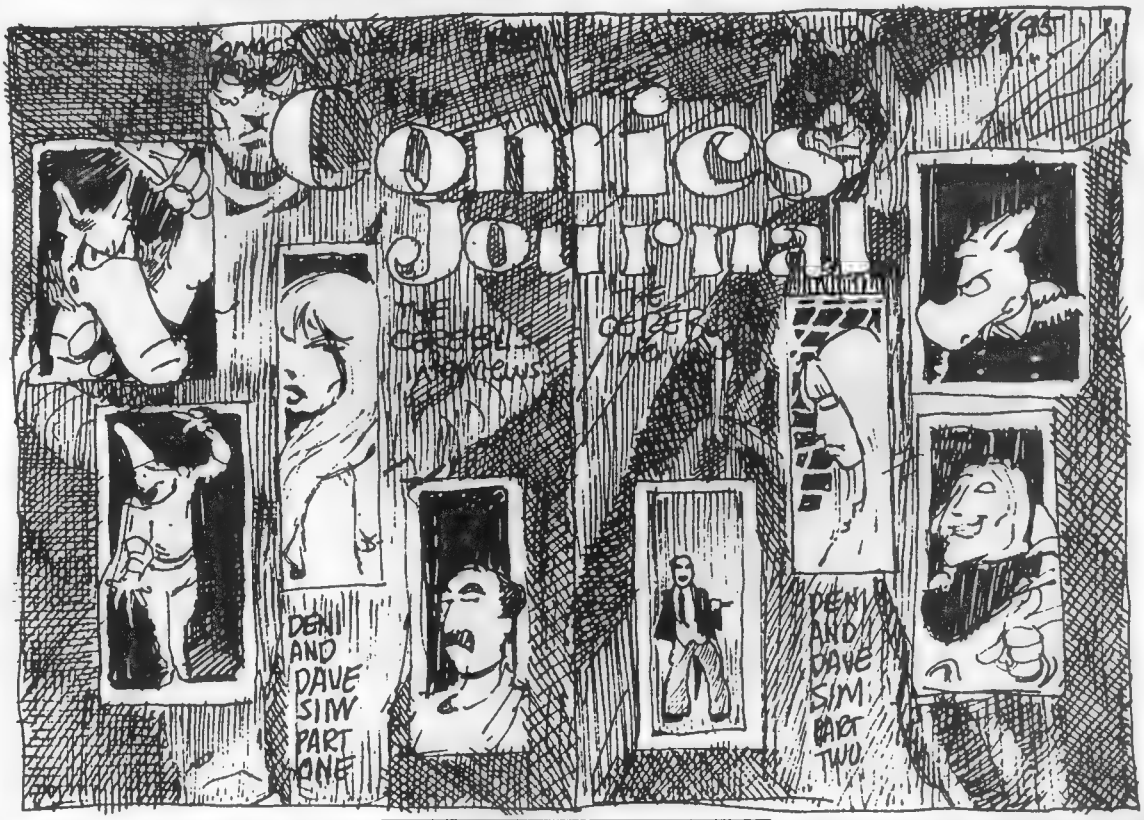
STEVE: *That was the cover for #122?*

DAVE: That's the one. It was funny, because I got back from a trip — actually, I had broken up with my girlfriend on the trip — and I got back and I met **Gerhard** for a couple of beers after pissing and moaning about breaking up with my girlfriend. I asked if he had gotten the cover done and he said, "Yeah." I asked how did it turn out and he said, "I don't know. I don't really like it." I said, "Well, it will take my mind off my troubles; let's go take a look at it." We went to take a look at it and I thought, "That's brilliant, that's it. That's exactly what I was looking for." But the fact that I wasn't there to say that when he got it done, his first reaction is, "It's wrong." And the same thing happens to me when I get my part done — "Boy, Ger better save this one." I'm always very pleased that people like the covers as much as they do. It's a common compliment; I just wish I liked them as much as they like them.

STEVE: *Well, when I got #150, I just knew when I looked at it that I was in trouble. You know how garish most comics covers are — and in a month where everything on the racks around it was just boiling over with violence, particularly graphic violence if you are talking about the Barker books — yours was the one that had me going "uh oh."*

DAVE: But then I had also spent a year building that and nobody knew that I was building anything. The same sort of thing happened with the cover to #130,

The makings of CJ covers 82 & 83.



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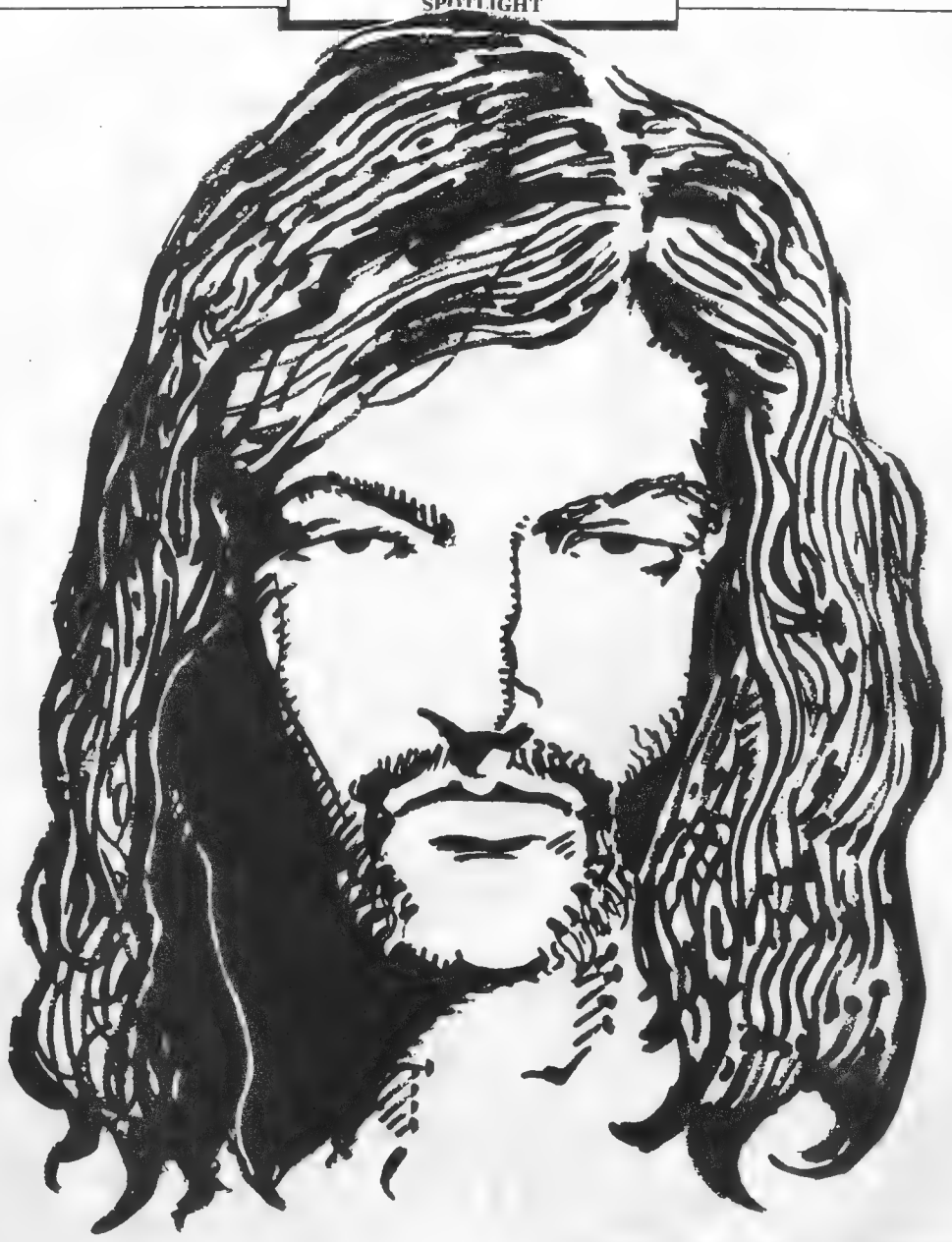


Illustration accompanying Barry Windsor-Smith's interview in COMIC ART NEWS AND REVIEWS, 1974. Dave had interviewed him in Detroit in 1973, at the height of popularity of his work on the CONAN comic book.

Original Cerebus Mascot logo for Cerebus fanzine, 1977.

AARDVARK·VANAHEIM PRESS

"It is a unique thing to decide to do one story for 26 years."

with the door just buckling in slightly. I love doing those kinds of covers, because it's as if most of the fans have gone to sleep, and the rest are really starting to beg: "Come on, make something happen." They really do. They pick up the comic and they have this sudden burst of anxiety. The same as if they were sitting at work thinking, "Jesus, I have been so bored lately," and arrive home to find the front door kicked in. It's a little more real than your average entertainment.

STEVE: *I think what you've achieved here is unprecedented in comics history. I have done my homework over the past two weeks. I can't find a record anywhere in the world of someone writing, drawing, and publishing 150 issues of their own work. Do you know of any?*

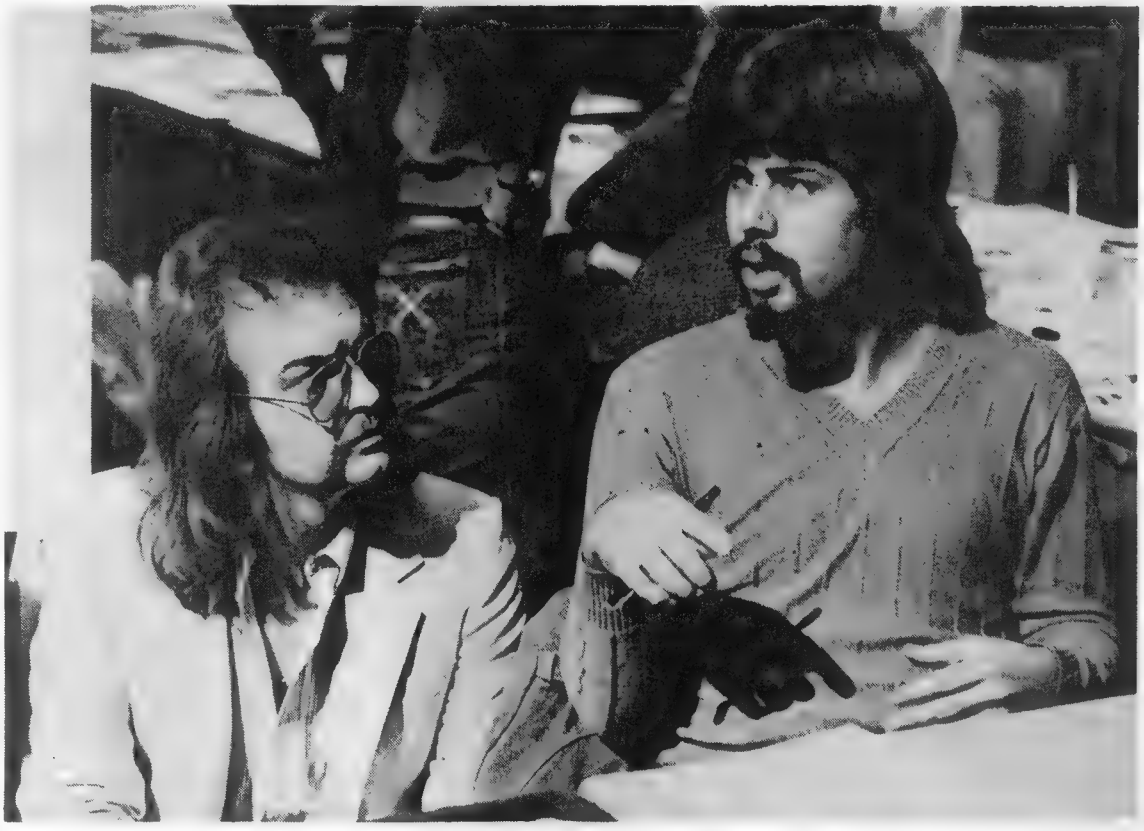
DAVE: No, no.

STEVE: *Why do you think the industry seems to be so afraid of this achievement?*

DAVE: I think it's got a lot of the same quality as the 24-hour comic. I did one, you did one, we rave about it. It was a great experience, but as soon as someone asks me if I'm ever going to do another one it's, like, probably not. Doing a long story like CEREBUS is a lot like that. It has so much to recommend it but, at the same time, it's not difficult to see why someone would avoid doing it. It is a very unique thing to decide to do one story for 26 years. Obviously, you can only do one of them, for one thing; I can't really start another one when I am done. Of the people who have done extended stories like that, I was out for dinner at a convention one time and I was talking to someone who was asking me, "First of all, why on earth would you do 300 issues?" and second of all, "Now that you are doing it why don't you stop and start doing something else?" Coincidentally, **Marv Wolfman** happened to be sitting across the table, and I was sort of looking to him for help. I turned to him and said, "You did TOMB OF DRACULA for 70 issues with the same creative team, **Gene Colan** and **Tom Palmer.** Can you not back me up on this, that there is a quality to doing an extended story like that, in terms of getting to know the characters, the story sort of writing itself and amazing things coming out that you are really convinced have nothing to do with you? You didn't come up with that, it just sort of appeared there." And of course he's nodding very vigorously and is saying yes, yes, there's no question about it that in his experience of writing, nothing has approached TOMB OF DRACULA for what it did for him, how it felt — but at the same time he's not at all keen to do another 70 issues of something. It's an attraction/repulsion thing. As much as you're attracted to it, that's why I compare it to the 24-hour comic, the sheer amount of energy and large bits of yourself that are required to do it, makes it completely understandable why someone would not want to do it.

STEVE: *Let's just talk now, about Dave Sim, writer and artist. Have there been any disadvantages in doing CEREBUS on a monthly basis, roughly a page a day?*

DAVE: No, I can't say that that has ever bothered me or that that has ever caused any kind of real problem. I did the first 14 issues bi-monthly and I found there was a psychological strain of *stopping* doing it for the month in-between to do advertising, or whatever it is that I was doing on the month in-between to make revenues. The psychological wrench of



Dave with Barry Windsor-Smith at a convention in Albany, New York, in 1984.

Gerhard and Sim.

THE BEAVERS
SAY! THERE'S A SURPRISE!
SIM #91
WAY AT THE BACK OF THE CUPBOARD I FOUND TWO SLICES OF RAISIN BREAD...
IT WAS JUST WHAT I HAD MY MOUTH READY FOR... HMMM. IT TASTES KIND OF.... FUNNY!
PROBABLY BECAUSE A WEEK AGO IT WAS TWO SLICES OF WHITE BREAD...
SUDDENLY I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD...
SIM

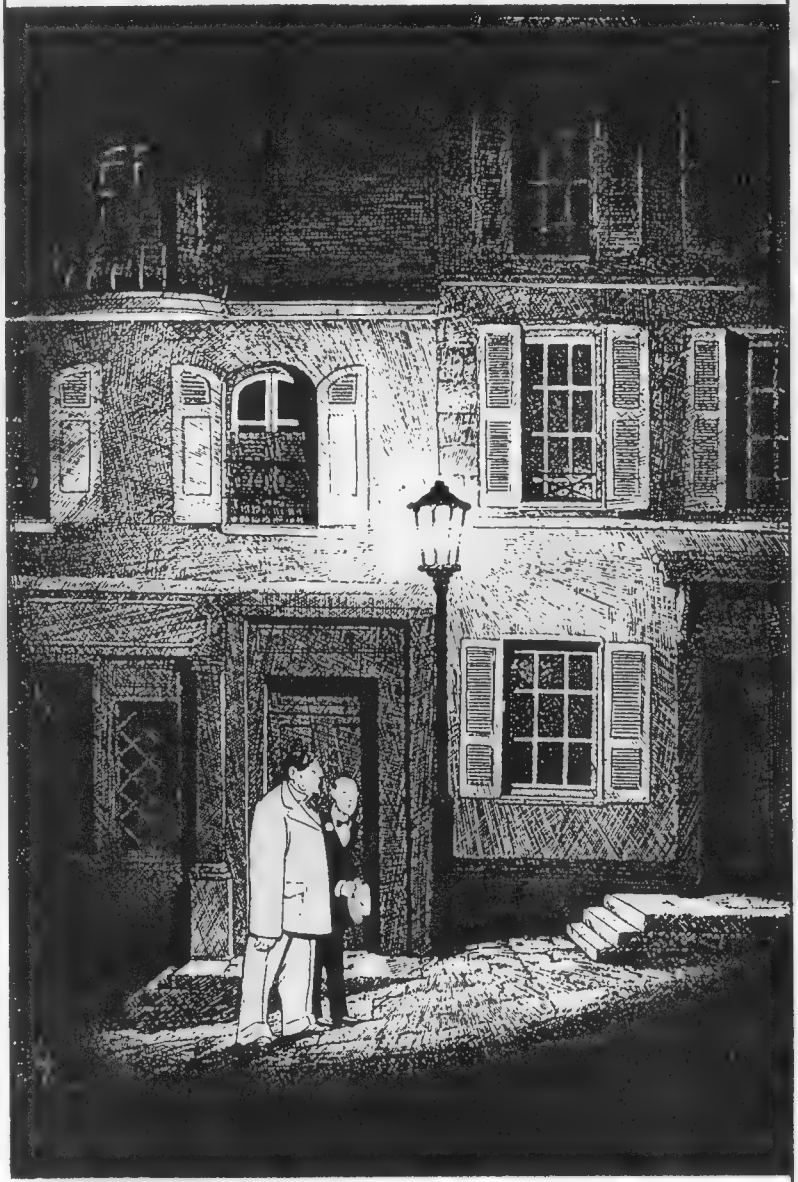
THE BEAVERS, a weekly strip in the KITCHENER WATERLOO RECORD from December, 1976 to December, 1978

"Doing CEREBUS never cost me anything emotionally."

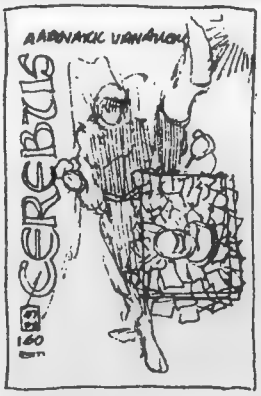
getting out of this world I created and doing something to please somebody else — where the check was on the line — and then psychologically getting back into it, was wrenching. I think even at this point where I could do the book bi-monthly and probably do nothing the other month, it would be too wrenching psychologically to keep pulling myself out of it and putting myself back into it. I found it interesting, **John Byrne** saying that he was leaving the trenches — he wasn't going to be doing a monthly book anymore — and then just finding out that it was in his blood. I hope to hell that I don't find that out in the year 2004, that inside of six months I'm back doing a monthly title again, because I'm just too badly hooked to do anything else. It wouldn't surprise me. It's such a unique skill to be able to produce a whole comic book in a month. There are so few people who can do it. There's very few people who can produce a comic book every four months. If you take an average illustrator out of commercial art and tell him you've got to produce 30 pages and you've got to be able to draw this character from any angle, keep it interesting, you've got to draw it fast and you've got to be better than you were last month and you've got to keep everybody's attention engaged and you have to do it for probably a tenth of what you made drawing that toaster, they would look at you like you were nuts. Our whole field is full of guys who could probably do the average commercial artist's yearly production in four or five afternoons and take the rest of the year off, but we don't do that because the only reason to do comic books is because you love them.

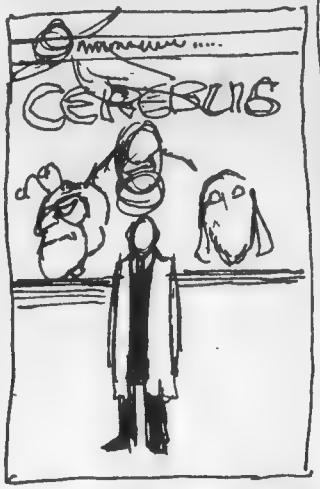
STEVE: *Maintaining the pace of writing, drawing, and publishing a monthly comic is no day at the beach. It has to take a lot out of you.*

DAVE: Yes, but at the same time, everything does. It is still the line of least resistance in my life. I've always been a big advocate of at least trying it. If self-publishing is not for you, you'll know pretty quickly that it's not for you, that you're a guy who, for good or ill, should be working for other people or should have somebody handling all the business side. I tend to think it really hasn't taken a toll. I remember seeing an interview with **Dennis Hopper** where they were asking him about the crazy life style, all the women and all the drugs, didn't that take a toll? That's the stuff that takes a toll on you. The work doesn't take a toll on you — doing CEREBUS has never cost me anything emotionally. Everything that has to do with having a real life — marriage and girlfriends, especially — I've always found *that* to be what has taken a toll on me. At the same time, I still feel that I am about 16 years old. I don't do anything different on a day-to-day basis that I didn't do during summer vacation between high school years. I just sink right up to my neck in comic books and I exist there, but now it's 365 days a year. I used to take weekends off until I realized that I had more fun on the weekend drawing without the pressure. If I get a page done that's fine, if I only get a panel done that's fine, too. If I do something that is never going to get seen by anybody but I got the joy out of drawing it . . . that's where the back cover of #150 came from, "The first half," with Cerebus as the football player. I had no idea that I was going to use that, but I was in on the weekend and I thought I've always wanted to draw a football player. To draw Cerebus as a football player and then ultimately for it to become a back cover and now it's going to be a poster and a T-shirt — the response to that has been phenomenal. Everybody commented on it, which is what usually happens when you do something just because you wanted to do it. If you really, really wanted to do it and it just dropped out of your pen, that's what people are



"I owe a debt to Curt Swan in terms of drawing people





going to respond to.

STEVE: *When I see Cerebus considering cutting his throat because of the Cirinists, I shouldn't assume that the Cirinists are symbolic of anything to do with comics or the comics industry?*

DAVE: No, no. I've been at the point of wanting to cut my own throat. There's no question about it. Sometimes it's because of comics and sometimes it's because of the real-life Cirinists. *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: *I won't go reading anything into this.*

DAVE: No, we'll leave that at arm's length. Cerebus in MELMOTH was very autobiographical. I don't usually stray too far over into autobiography *per se,* but certainly the sort of stunned quality that he had in MELMOTH . . . I had just come out of a particularly troublesome relationship where, basically, I went to Peter's Place just about every night and sat and stared at the wall full of bottles and drank my beer. That's the club that is owned by Dino. Janice worked there up until last week. Doris works there. That was about as close as I had ever gotten to autobiography. I wasn't clutching a doll and a sword but I might as well have; in a figurative sense, that's exactly what I was doing. People knew me well enough not to come up and talk to me and that went on for months. Aside from that, I just worked.

STEVE: *Let me ask you one other thing about #150 and then we can go on to some other stuff altogether. It was interesting to me that when you drew the flashback with Cerebus by the campfire, you drew the old Cerebus. What did that feel like?*

DAVE: That was good. I did that before, towards the end of CHURCH AND STATE in "Talking to Tarim Part One." Went back to the original Cerebus. There is this tendency that I have to hook everything in the book up. Obviously, the shortening of the snout, the whole change of the physical appearance of the character from the early issues to the later issues, was unconscious — but it seemed like a "kissing to be clever" sort of thing to incorporate that into the story, as if this is just something that happens to Cerebus from time to time. Every once in a while he sneezes too hard and his snout blows out, his ears get all pointy. It's sort of making fun of the continuity freaks while at the same time giving them something which is a fun continuity thing.

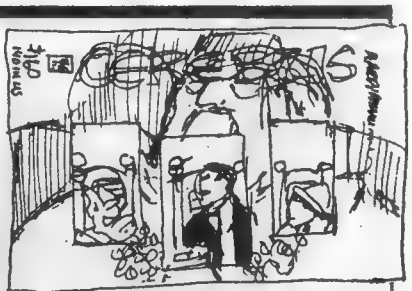
STEVE: *As a storyteller, too, part of why it caught my attention is that it was such a clear storytelling device. I wouldn't have known that that was a younger period in his life, otherwise.*

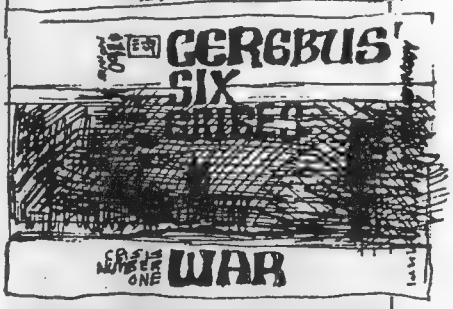
DAVE: Yeah, yeah, it's very convenient that way. That happens accidentally, but obviously when I was working on the sequence I was thinking I wanted to make it pretty clear that this is a flashback. How do I do that without getting out the Letraset and Letrasetting "flashback" across the page? So that was a very convenient way to do it.

STEVE: *I didn't want to touch on political stuff, and I won't, but I will say that it pisses me off that you reached issue #150 and there seems to be not even a shrug from the industry. I mean, it must pain you — or doesn't it matter to you?*

DAVE: Not really, no. There was enough of a time period where there was *so* much attention paid to *every*thing that was going on in the book that I know what that's like and, consequently, I don't miss it. You get to a point where you realize

and making you believe they are interacting on the page."





that what you're doing is doing the thing for yourself. It's a really good job. It's a lot of work but it is something that I enjoy doing. I get fan mail. How many people do their job all their lives and will get maybe one or two pats on the back from the boss? And on a day-in and day-out basis I'm getting letters from people who are saying I'm a god, or whatever. That's a very unique kind of job to have. Also, I haven't been that good to the environment. If you decide that you're going to walk 15 steps away from everything and you are going to just sit there and see how everything shakes out — which is basically what we've done for the last three years — you can't really expect the environment to get too bent out of shape when you reach some sort of milestone. If you're not going to share everything with them, they're not going to share very much with you.

STEVE: *Do you see your impact on any comics out there as a writer, as an artist, as a creator?*

DAVE: Not really. I mean, I *do*. Obviously, if somebody sends you a comic book in the mail and says, "I wouldn't have done this without you" and then you read it, you maybe read it a little differently, because they sent it to you specifically to say you inspired this. But I know that it is tough enough establishing your own voice while doing comics and the *last* thing you need is some boring old fart sitting there saying, "You stole that from me, that's mine there, I first came up with that, nobody thought of that technique until I did." In all of our cases, we are just the custodians of it, each of us has a little piece of whatever it is that fires us all up. I owe an enormous debt to **Curt Swan** in terms of drawing people and making you really believe that they are interacting on the page. It's still difficult for me to believe the **Curt Swan** stories were actually drawn by somebody — because the posture and the attitude and facial expressions were so perfect. But that doesn't mean that I want **Curt Swan** to pick up an issue of CEREBUS and go, "You lifted that from me, that's mine, I used to draw that face all the time." Everybody takes, *has* to take, a certain amount from other guys. First of all, as a learning experience and, second of all, in the developing of their own style. And *then* they bring a certain amount of *themselves* to it. There is a lot of **Dan DeCarlo** in the **Brothers Hernandez's** work, but I don't think you would say that the **Brothers Hernandez** are nothing but third-rate **Dan DeCarlos.** There really does come a point where you either bring enough that is new to your influences that your work becomes original or you just endlessly and slavishly copy your influences.

STEVE: *Talking about influences — not the superficial way most people think about influences, but in a* deeper *sense — what was there in the comics community when you started CEREBUS that prompted you to have such a grandiose dream, to pursue 30 years of doing one story? What drove you to that? Was there something other than just the love for the medium you obviously have?*

DAVE: Well, that would be it. I think that you have to remember that I first said that I am going to do CEREBUS for 300 issues in 1979 and it was, easily, five years before anybody took it even half seriously. It was just completely unheard of. Comics was not something, at the time when I started doing CEREBUS, comics was not something that you did as a life's work. Comic books were something that you did to attract the attention of somebody so you could do something else. **The Studio** guys **(Bernie Wrightson, Barry Windsor-Smith, Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta)** when they started doing their pictures; "I have learned from comics and now I want to move into a more mature form."

STEVE: *As a publisher, Dark Horse might be a perfect example of that, given their recent move into feature film production.*

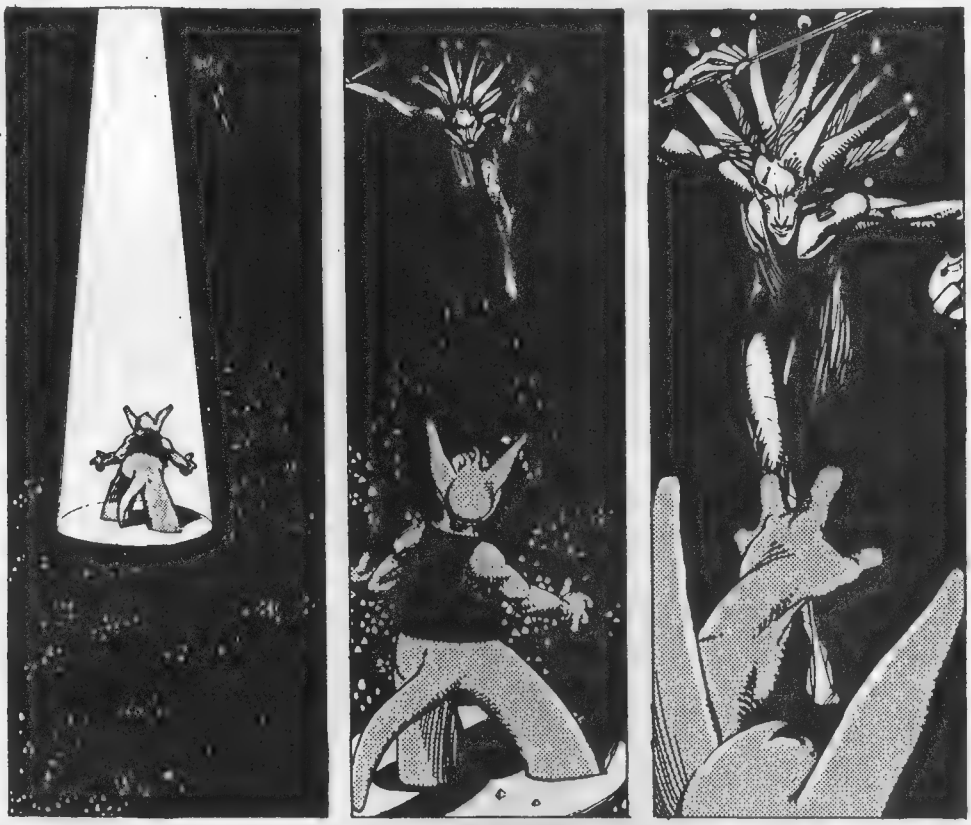
DAVE: Yeah, or the guys who move into storyboarding. **Chadwick** walked away from CONCRETE for a specific length of time because somebody offered him a movie.

STEVE: *Well, bear in mind that he came*

"What there is about CEREBUS that makes me feel good

out of storyboarding, too.

DAVE: Well, yeah exactly, but *that* doesn't tempt me. If somebody came and offered me a really interesting, artsy thing that I had never done before, I would not feel a wrenching choice between CEREBUS and that. Or even in comics, if someone came to me and said we want you to do, as a good example, a **Rolling Stones** comic book — we want you to do basically issue #86 but do it without CEREBUS — that would not be



Artwork ©1992 Barry Windsor-Smith

Selected sequence (from pages 3 and 4) of Barry Windsor-Smith's "CEREBUS DREAMS" story from Dave's SWORDS OF CEREBUS (volume 5). Barry also provided the front and back cover paintings for this collection of Cerebus reprints. The illustration on the next page is from Dave's follow-up.

is working on the book. Working on the actual stories."

a temptation. I would love to do it, it would be fun, as opposed to taking over, say, BATMAN — which I would just treat as a joke and which would *not* be a temptation. Compared to developing and continuing the CEREBUS story as I have done for 14 years, I mean there is no comparison. Not only did God spare me and let me make it through CHURCH AND STATE, please, God, just hold off on hitting me with the bus until I get this one done. Kill me halfway through JAKA'S STORY if you have to — but at least let me finish CHURCH AND STATE. Of course, once I'm coming up on the last few issues of JAKA'S STORY . . .

STEVE: *You're worried about that same bus with your number on it?*

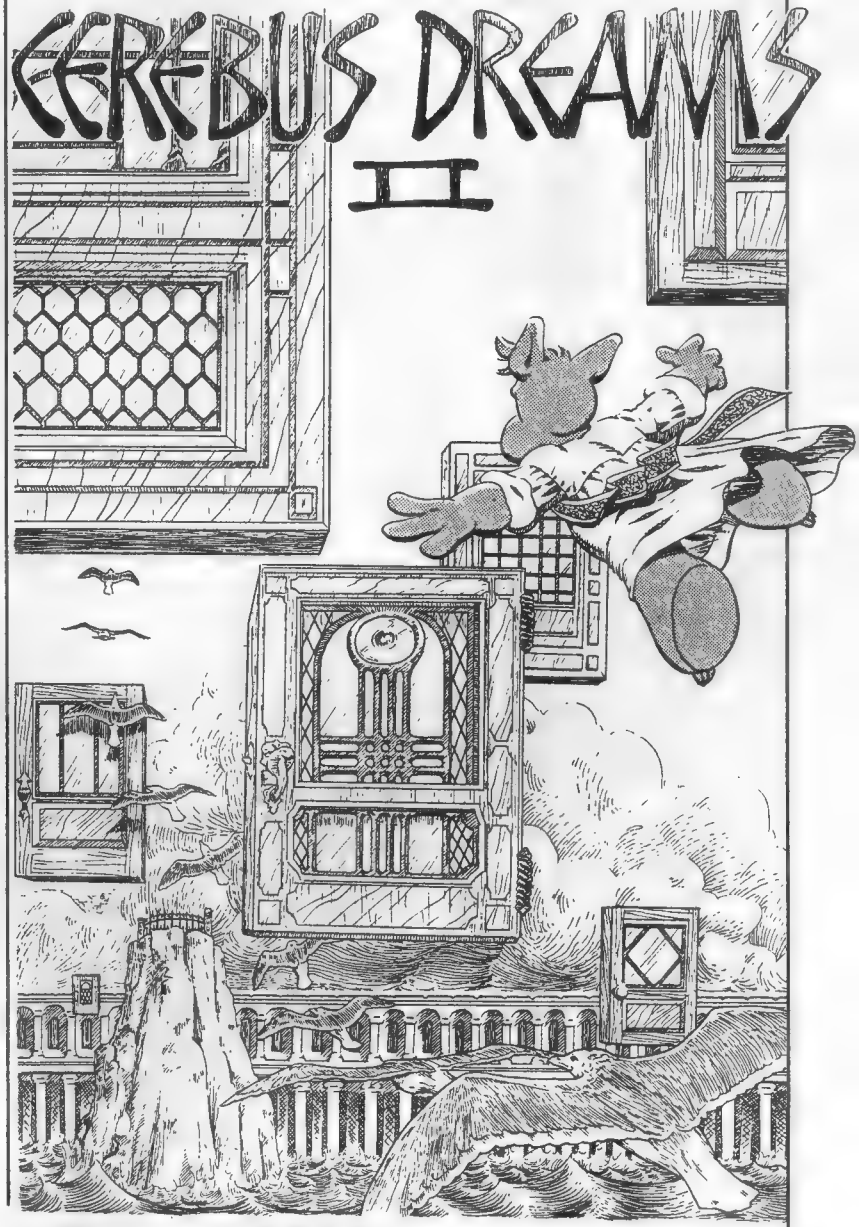
DAVE: "God? Remember when I said just let me finish CHURCH AND STATE? Well, uh . . ."

STEVE: *Let's talk about the temptations that* have *been put in your path. You're one of the few people in the industry who have resisted licensing. You have resisted — and I do want to get specific reasons from you — foreign translations of your work. There's a lot of things that could be done to exploit CEREBUS which wouldn't necessarily — ha, fat chance — interrupt you doing the comic.*

DAVE: That's right. This is the problem with Steve interviewing Dave about this — because we both know the nightmare you just went through.

STEVE: *Well, I'm playing devil's advocate here. Given the situation I've had to deal with recently regarding TABOO, a Spanish publisher pirating and badly translating stories from TABOO,* I *know exactly why you're reticent to deal with foreign editions of CEREBUS. But, I want to hear it from you for the good people out there. Why are these temptations to be avoided?*

DAVE: As **Henry David Thoreau** said, "Simply, simplify." If it's simple already, examine it and see what it is that is good, *maintain* that, and see what is bad, and if it's bad, just pass it by. By that I mean, I was never much tempted by merchandising and whatnot, because you are then dealing with those guys in the three-piece suits. I love the story of you talking to **Pete Laird** about merchandising when you met one of the Turtle Suits for the first time — I won't say which Suit, but it's a narrow list of candidates. You took an instant disliking to the guy. One of those people you would not allow to pet your dog, let alone invite him to dinner. And Pete looked at you with that very blank look that Pete does so well and said, "Well, they're all *like* that." There's not an amount of money in the world that would compel me to sit in the same room with somebody like that. I passionately disagree with them; I am at the opposite end of the spectrum from them and dealing with them would diminish what it is I enjoy about CEREBUS: the autonomy, *not* having to talk to people like that. If I don't have to talk to an editor, I certainly don't want to have to talk to somebody who is a licensing cop or senior agent, or whoever it is they are. What there is about CEREBUS that makes me feel good is working on the book. Working on the actual story. After about the first three or four years, once I had established a kind of "name" in the field, I got invited to conventions — somebody was willing to pay my plane fare, and my hotel room, and take me out for dinner and agree with everything I said. That seemed to me like the reason to do it. I get to travel, I get to go to these conventions, I make a lot of money doing sketches and I get to hang around with the organizer and he buys me dinner and all that, but obviously the novelty of that went away. At a specific point I had had enough of that, so that I then realized, "Well, son of a gun, that's not why I do it," because I didn't want to be



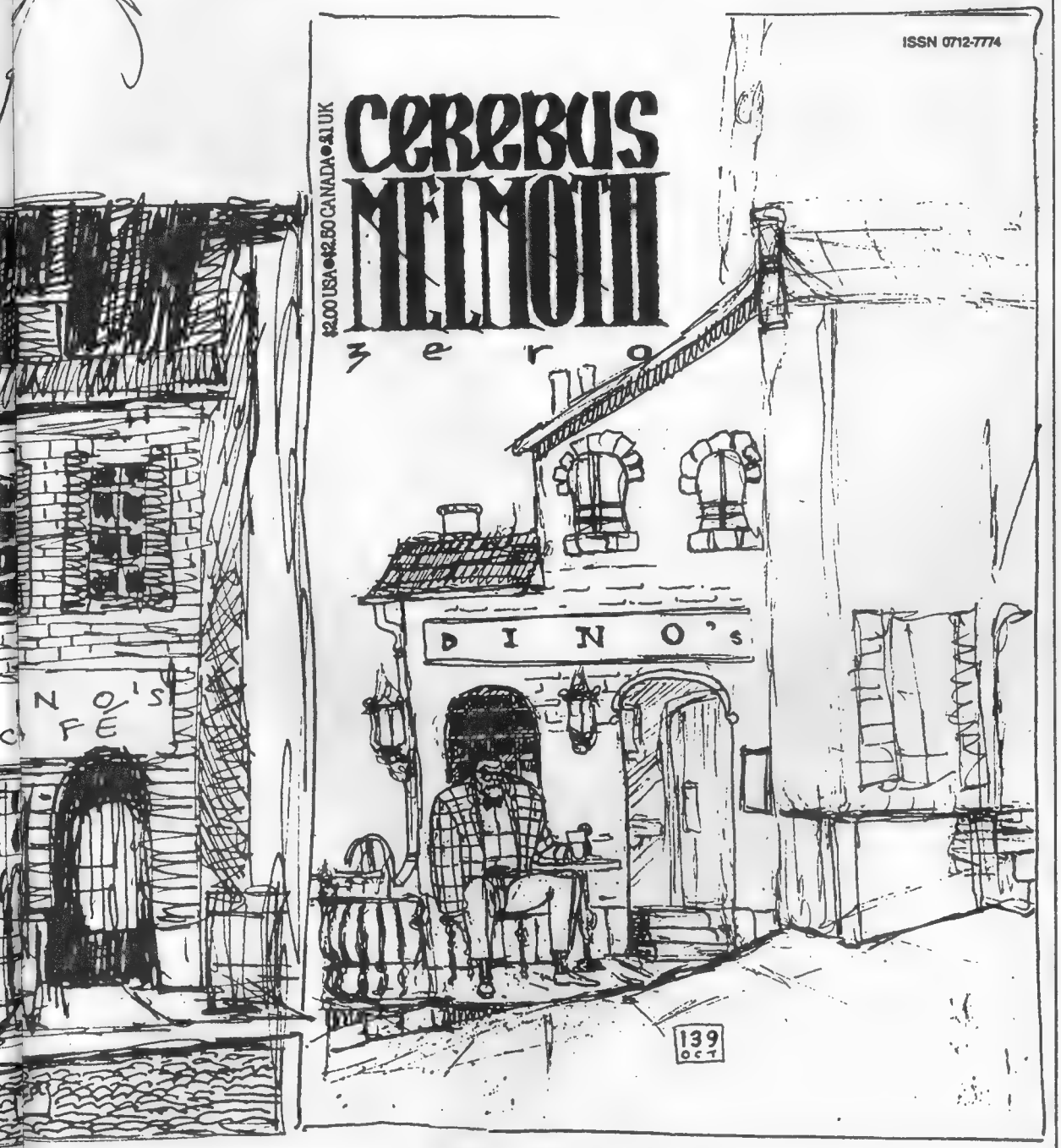
139
OCT
MELMOTH
DINO'S CAFE
HOTEL D'ALSACE
GEREBUS
MELMOTH
ZERO
DINO'S
GEREBUS
MELMOTH
ZERO

"DAUGHTER OF PALNU"
"THE ACTRESS AND THE BROTHERS"

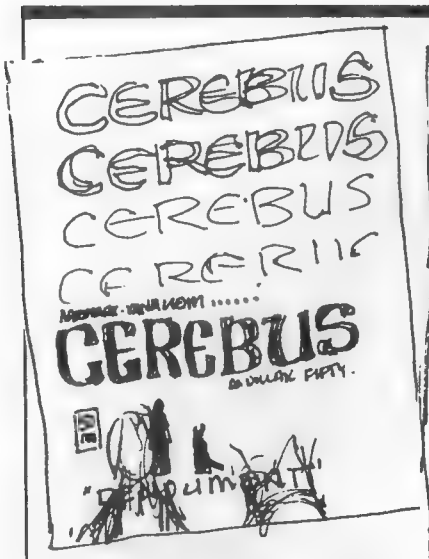
JOHN AND ROBERT AND MARILYN

LETTER FROM DORIAN AND CHEONE

The thought processes for the creation of Dave's MELMOTH (zero) cover.



"You've got to tell the other guy, "You don't like it? Fine.



away from the board anymore. Realizing I never *had* do do another shop signing, and I never *had* to do another convention for the rest of my life — I can just sit and draw my comic book — I leapt at that chance. That's what I wanted.

Once you realize the creating of the book is everything, then there are very few temptations. Anything that I agree to, or anything that I go after or that I accede to, is something that takes me away from the drawing board. Consequently, it has to go on the back burner. I mean, ART FORUM, which is one of the top art magazines in the United States, if not the world, has a one-page comic strip. **Lynda Barry's** done one. **Charles Burns** did one. And they sent copies to me and said, would you do one of these? Well, I'd love to, I really would. I would feel very good about myself having something in ART FORUM. I would love to sit down and just come up with something off the top of my head that fills one page. But it's always on the back burner. The guy phones, the art director or whatever, every month or so, and says, "Are you still interested?" I am sure he thinks that I am giving him the run-around, but I'm not. I'll do it when I am satisfied, I'm caught up with CEREBUS and when I think of something I want to do.

But if you start doing licensing, merchandising, translations and all of those sort of things, they all have to be accommodated into your day. Then you have to start allocating specific amounts of time. That's one of the challenges with the tour — the idea of doing a 21-city tour, which is going to take most of the year to do. I am structuring it in such a way so that it takes a minimum amount of my time away from the drawing board. It's become, in effect, my hobby. I write and draw the book for a living and I organize the tour as a hobby. But that's part and parcel of CEREBUS being the central thing in my life; the thing I derive the most happiness from; the thing that I am best at, and the thing that I get the best results out of the effort I put in.

STEVE: *Now that we have identified what* isn't *The Muse, I would like to be a little more concrete about identifying for the readers, what* is *The Muse. You and I have talked before about something that I'm trying to get myself back to now, the points where the story is writing iself, the drawings are drawing themselves. Which pages in what issues can you point to and say, "I didn't draw that, I didn't write that, that created itself?" Do any come to mind? That's a loaded question.*

DAVE: Sure. The trial of Astoria sort of leapt out of its own accord. "The Night Before" when Jaka came back to give Cerebus his sword. The two-part story where Cerebus was the Pope and he gets Bear to go and bring Jaka to him; the two-issue dialogue that they have. Usually, in that case, it has a lot to do with the characters. You find you've deluded yourself that you've *created* characters that you really *haven't* created. They were out there in the ether to begin with, just waiting for the proper medium, the proper channel or whatever to burst into existence. You develop such an affinity for those characters it really is as if you are observing their lives, trying to do right by them. It's not a matter of sitting there asking yourself, "Is that what Jaka would say?" If it's not the right thing for Jaka to say, it won't go down on the page. I mean, I'll *do* it but it will be the same as hitting the wrong note on the piano. You just keep doing the dialogue and fixing it until it's the *right* note on the piano.

There's always going to be some stuff you don't like.""

That's just an implication of a fully-formed character, somebody that exists outside of you; more like a *child* of yours than something that you put down on paper.

STEVE: *How did working with a second party, with Gerhard, affect that — and at what point did working with Ger enhance it?*

DAVE: It enhanced it because **Gerhard** wasn't a comic-book fan and had no background in comic books. He had read ARCHIE and stuff like that when he was 10 years old, but that was about the extent of what he knew about comics. There became no point in laying out a really nifty **Steranko** sequence because there wasn't somebody in the room going, "Wow, that's just like **Steranko,** or that's one step up from **Steranko."** It's the difference between working in the studio with **Gene Day** and working in the studio with **Gerhard.**

From **Gerhard** I get the reaction of a *person* — this is what anyone reading CEREBUS would think is pretty cool or funny or whatever. With Gene, there was no question that he had just as much of the comic-book world as his background, and it was obviously difficult to tell a lot of the times if we were doing something really innovative or if we were just doing the best **Steranko** we could do. Ger's also a sounding board and he is there to talk to if I am unsure about something. He's a great audience, he laughs out loud if it's funny, and it's always easier finishing a page if Ger laughed when he read it — assuming it was intended as a funny part. If it was a serious part and he laughed when he read it, then it's a bitch. But definitely, if I put a joke in, like issue #151 where the judge-like character shows up and tells Death that he's not Death at considerable length and then Death goes "Well, fuck me" and disappears — the moment Ger read that, he burst out laughing. Then I lost whatever ambivalence I had about this really ponderous character going, "Well, fuck me." So he's a good audience in that way but, really, we don't comment on each other's work that much. Every once in a while the other guy will say, "It's a piece of shit," and you go, "Fuck, *I* like it okay." That's about it. If something is really amazing and you say, "Wow, that's really amazing," it has to be something pretty amazing. This relationship is going on seven years and we've seen a lot of amazing pages come out of each other. We try to do the best that we can and our theory is if you're not happy with it you've always got another page tomorrow that you can do better on. That's about the extent of our reasoning on the influence on each other's work.

There does come a time where you've got to tell the other guy, "Don't worry about it. You don't like it? Fine. There's always going to be stuff that you are not going to like. Try harder on the next one." The MELMOTH cover that has Oscar sitting out front of the cafe and it's all sort of light pinks and light mauves and whatnot and the shadows of the birds going up the wall — I didn't like my part of that when I had it done, he didn't like his part of it when *he* had it done and then he colored it and he didn't like that. Then the separations came in and that was even worse, and then the printed copy came in and that was even worse. But then **Michael Zulli** called a month, a month and a half ago, and he said be sure to tell Ger that he really liked that cover. So, what are you going to do? The one cover that Michael singles out to say, "That was just amazing" was, as far as we were concerned, something that just didn't pull together.

STEVE: *That was the MELMOTH cover?*

DAVE: Yes, #147.

STEVE: *That was a good cover.*

DAVE: Sometimes it's got nothing to do with the cover, really. It's just whatever's going on in our lives at the time, but we don't know that because we are both going *through* whatever's going on at the time. A particularly lousy issue of the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE is enough

Editorial cartoons from the short-lived WAP freelancers' newsletter.

CORP.
CORP.
PUBLISHER
EDITOR
SIM
SURE--I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT SELF-PUBLISHING BUT IT SEEMS SO RISKY...

"YUMMY FUR: Chester Brown does amazing stuff."

to throw me off for the rest of the day. You know what I am saying. Not that there's anything wrong with the BUYER'S GUIDE, but a particularly bad mix of letters or news headlines "The Industry Triumphant," "This Week's New Improved Robin," "Hologram Covers — the Wave of the Future." It can make you feel physically ill.

STEVE: *What's going on out there that inspires you? What's going on out there in terms of books, music, what is it that you draw inspiration from right now?*

DAVE: SANDMAN, no question about it. Watching what Neil is doing, I think maybe it's a little out of focus now, but that's okay. Usually, if something that was really focused goes slightly out of focus, it means that it's ready to sharpen up onto something else and you just have to sit there and wait for it. It would be very difficult to measure up to "Mid Summer Night's Dream" and "The Dream of a Thousand Cats" stories. Those things happen and you sit there going, "Goo-goo. More for me, please." Like anybody else, I'm part of the SANDMAN audience. I develop my expectations about what I want next time, and I get it or I don't get it. But certainly on a month in/month out basis, I don't start work until I've read SANDMAN. I still find interviews in THE COMICS JOURNAL with different guys inspiring, helping me to clarify my own opinions, seeing how they answer their questions, seeing a range of their work interspersed around it. EIGHT BALL, YUMMY FUR, the same kind of thing — you discover something and you then read back as far as you can and you tend to develop a neophyte's anticipation. "Now that I've read everything of this and I didn't know it existed before, I have a pretty good idea of what he should do next and that wasn't it." I face that all the time. **Chester Brown** does amazing stuff. He comes at things from several different approaches. Just watching somebody who isn't locked into something is a treat. He'll get back to Ed the Happy Clown when he's ready to get back to Ed the Happy Clown. When he's ready to get back to Matthew, he'll get back to Matthew. It doesn't matter what people say. If that's not what he wants to do that month, well, you're going to see what he *did* want to do that month. That takes a lot of balls and to get to the end of an unpredictable issue and not feel too let down, that takes

Mick has an eye on CEREBUS, everyone's favorite Aardvark.

"Balls and talent together. That's pretty rare to find."

a lot of talent — balls and talent together, that's usually pretty rare to find. There are a lot of different things. "From Hell" is amazing. I just got in the TABOO 5.

STEVE: *They made it through Customs! Halleluja.*

DAVE: Yes, they did. And watching Eddie grow and watching Alan really bite down on this story is an absolute joy. When I got the first part of "From Hell" from you in photocopy form from Alan, I got to that first part with **Queen Victoria** and I went, "Well, there goes Alan's knighthood." I thought if there was a possibility that we would have our first knighthood in comics, Alan would be a good bet. "From Hell" certainly puts the boots to that one. It's just amazing watching Eddie grow as an artist, watching the story evolve. Alan has even acted out part of it for me. I have had the fortunate experience of having a bit of "From Hell" acted out for me by Alan and most of DARK KNIGHT acted out for me by **Frank Miller** before I saw either story. It's very difficult to measure up to an **Alan Moore** or **Frank Miller** performance of something. And in both cases they exceeded my expectations. "From Hell" creates very high expectations with every chapter and I haven't yet been disappointed — always just can't wait to finish it so I can go back to reread it.

STEVE: *How about outside comics?*

DAVE: Just saw FISHER KING and thought it was amazing. Exactly the kind of thing that I am trying to do in CEREBUS. It's very difficult to do in a society that has become very literal-minded. They want to know, did that really exist? Or what was that — what did they see there? Instead they just *show* it and weave it so beautifully that, as movies go, there is absolutely no fat, no padding. I was blown away by it and I am blown away by very few films. I really liked that. DON'T TELL MOM THE

©1975, 1992 DC Comics, Inc.

A true rarity from Dave's drawing board past — this was the back cover for the fanzine THE LEGION OUTPOST. (For those who care: The front cover was by Curt Swan and Klaus Janson.) The illustration is about 17 years old.

These two pages: Dave bounces dialogue, character and costume design, and story pacing off the page.

(3) WELL THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.

(3) I'M JAKA'S SWEET OLD AUNT VICTORIA

(4) NOW DO YOU DO

8 (1) YOU'RE (2) AUNT? SEE WHERE NOW YOU'RE CLEARLY NOT

WHY! YOU'RE

(2) PLEASE! NO NAMES... THE HILLS THEMSELVES HAVE EARS

(3) (looks up at the hills)

(4) ISN'T THAT FUNNY? ~~YOU KNOW~~ I THOUGHT I WAS JUST ~~MAKING~~ ~~SMALL TALK~~ BEING COLORFUL

(5) ~~PAUSE~~ YAW ~~THE NAMELESS~~ NAMELESS' HOUSEGUEST!

(6) YOUR MAGNIFICENCE

9 (1) OH JOYOUS SON OF ALL ~~THE~~ PARMAC AND THOSE ~~WHO~~ EVERLASTING PROVINCES ~~AND~~ AND TERRITRIES - OF

(4) THE REAL ESTATE CHECKLIST AND WHO I CAN BEAT AT DOMINOES

WE SCRAPPED ALL THAT.

(5) OH!

(6) I HAD NO IDEA

10 (1) ~~AND~~ MIGHT I ENQUIRE THEN AS TO THE CURRENT PROTOCOL FOR ADDRESSING YOUR MAGNIFICENCE IN AN UNOFFICIAL ~~CAPACITY~~ ENCOUNTER OF THIS

(2) YOU TAKE YOUR LITTLE FINGER AND YOU HOLD IT UP.

(3) (holds up PINKY) OTHER ONE

(4) ATTABOY

(3) SCRAPPED? YOUR GRACE?

(2) SAVE YOUR BREATH, CHUBBY.

WE SCRAPPED ALL THAT

"FISHER KING: Amazing. Just what I'm trying to do."

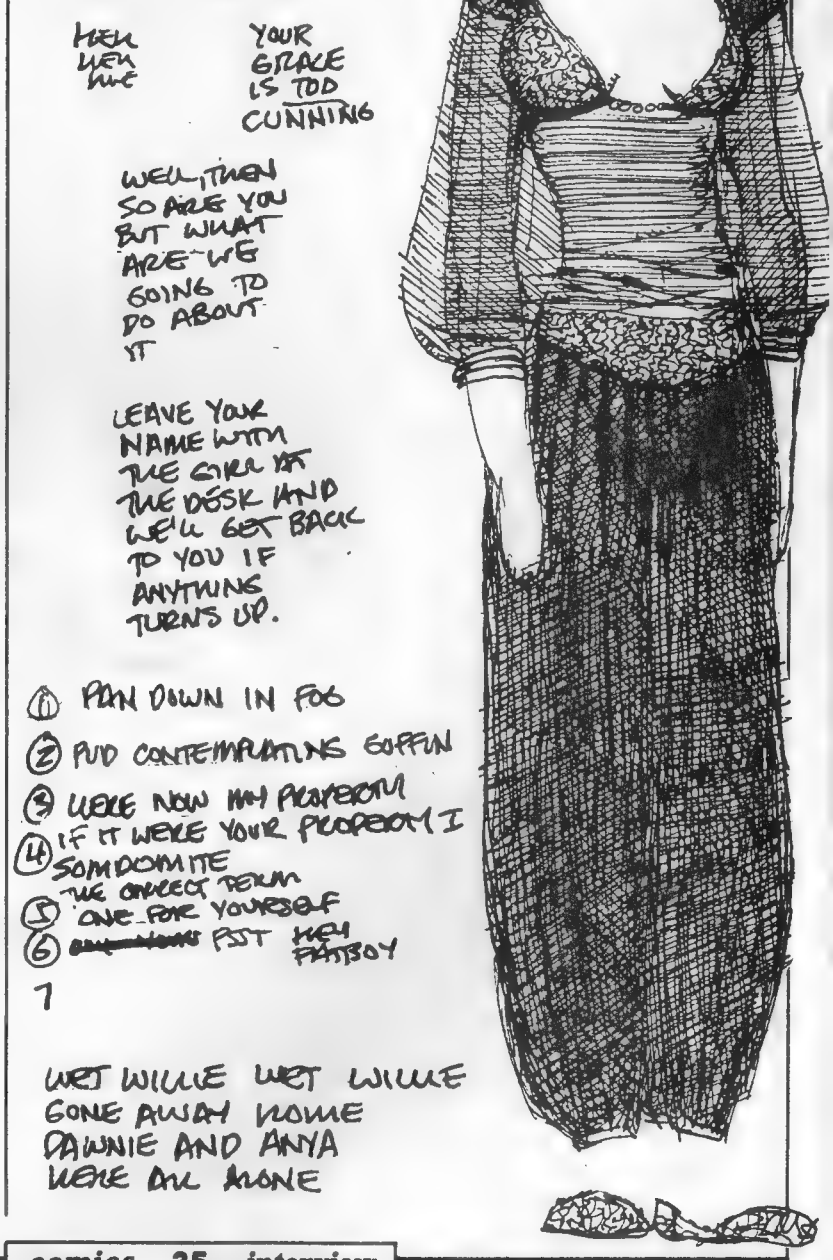
BABYSITTER'S DEAD. I mean there's no better experience in the world than looking at **Christina Applegate** for an hour and half thirty feet tall. Her face was a little broken out on the one side, you could tell from the makeup covering up what order the shots were done in because it would be broken out, then it would clear up, then it would be broken out. Couldn't tell you what the plot of the movie was.

STEVE: *You weren't paying attention.*

DAVE: No, but it was worth every penny of it.

STEVE: *I have one other big question. I have the feeling from #149, #150, #151, there's another direction you are setting up here. Can you talk about it — or is it something that's going to have to live itself out?*

DAVE: I can talk about it a bit. It's the *next* novel in the same sense that CHURCH AND STATE finished off HIGH SOCIETY. A lot of what HIGH SOCIETY alluded to, the whole idea of lest *is,* became secondary to the political story while I was doing HIGH SOCIETY because, as I was saying before, I was running out of room. In the actual Middle Ages the church was preeminent and in our day and age, politics tends to be preeminent. CHURCH AND STATE helped me, combined with HIGH SOCIETY, to try illustrating what a society that had an almost complete balance of politics and religion would be like. You take those two and MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS is the third leg that balances out HIGH SOCIETY and CHURCH AND STATE. Essentially, what you are going to be seeing is a lot of the flavor and tone of HIGH SOCIETY, a lot of the approach of HIGH SOCIETY combined with a lot of the themes and the events and underpinnings of CHURCH AND STATE. The underpinnings gradually become more important than what is happening on the surface, which was really the structure of CHURCH AND STATE. MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS explains why that was so; what HIGH SOCIETY and CHURCH AND STATE *were* and why it is now necessary to have a MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS to take it to the next level. CHURCH AND STATE was a very high up, very far away HIGH SOCIETY. MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS is a very high up, way far away CHURCH AND STATE. If you want to take them in order, there's the CEREBUS volume which sets the ground rules. HIGH SOCIETY is Power, basically, and all those things like politics and wealth which are the underpinnings of power. HIGH SOCIETY is about power then broken down into politics, wealth, influence and all those kinds of things. CHURCH AND STATE is about Faith, breaking that down to "what do you believe in?"; Church and State, church *versus* state and how they affect belief. So what do we have? We've got Power, we've got Faith. JAKA'S STORY is about Love. Love as it *is,* as opposed to the classic portrayal of love. Trying to take all of love's trappings away and show what a monster force it really is, both positive and negative. Love is very, very positive in everyone's life and love is very, very negative in everyone's life. And then of course the little one in the middle, the little one just on the tag end of the male end of things, once you have Power,


HEH HEH HE
YOUR GRACE IS TOO CUNNING
WELL, THEN SO ARE YOU BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT
LEAVE YOUR NAME WITH THE GIRL AT THE DESK AND WE'LL GET BACK TO YOU IF ANYTHING TURNS UP.
1) PAN DOWN IN FOG
2) PUD CONTEMPLATING COFFIN
3) WERE NOW IN PROPEROM
4) IF IT WERE YOUR PROPEROM I SOMDOMITE
5) THE CORRECT TERM ONE FOR YOURSELF
6) ~~[illegible]~~ FIST HEH FATBOY
7
WRT WILLIE WRT WILLIE GONE AWAY HOME DAWNIE AND ANYA WERE ALL ALONE

"Death tends to be the inner part of the vortex. Not a lazy,

Faith and Love, the next is death which is MELMOTH's theme.

STEVE: *Yeah, MELMOTH was an amazing meditation on mortality.*

DAVE: It was a lot of little deaths. I was trying to show how, over the course of our lives, we die a lot of times in a lot of different ways before we get the big enchilada. Things expire out of your life that just aren't going to be there anymore and they can be as small as an acquaintance or as big as your basic faith in yourself, whatever it is. And death tends to be abrupt. Death tends to be the inner part of the vortex. It's not a lazy, swirling, circular motion. It's a rapid rotation just before bye-bye. I tried to portray that as accurately as possible. It was nice to sort of slide that one in there, a quick 12 issues with exactly that kind of meditation feel to it. Because that sets up for Birth and Re-birth. What's the next thing after death? It's always difficult to come up with something after death. The same as people saying, what could Cerebus possibly be now that he's the Pope? That was one of the central questions of CHURCH AND STATE while people were reading it. He was a barbarian, then he was a kitchen staff supervisor, then he was a ranking diplomatic representative, then he was Cerebus the candidate, then Cerebus the Prime Minister, then he became Cerebus the Prime Minister again, then Cerebus the Pope. What do you do after that? Well, the most obvious thing is Cerebus the house guest.

STEVE: *Cerebus, the frustrated lover lying in bed listening to Jaka making it upstairs with someone else. Why such a blood bath at the beginning of MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS? I'm still kind of reeling from that issue.*

DAVE: That was the end of death. It was also like the middle part of the story and it was a giant extrapolation of what I was already talking about. There's death and then there's Death. It was the release of pressure that had built. The same way that everyone forgot the danger in JAKA'S STORY until it reasserted itself. Everyone had gone to sleep reading MELMOTH and had forgotten exactly who the Cirinists are.

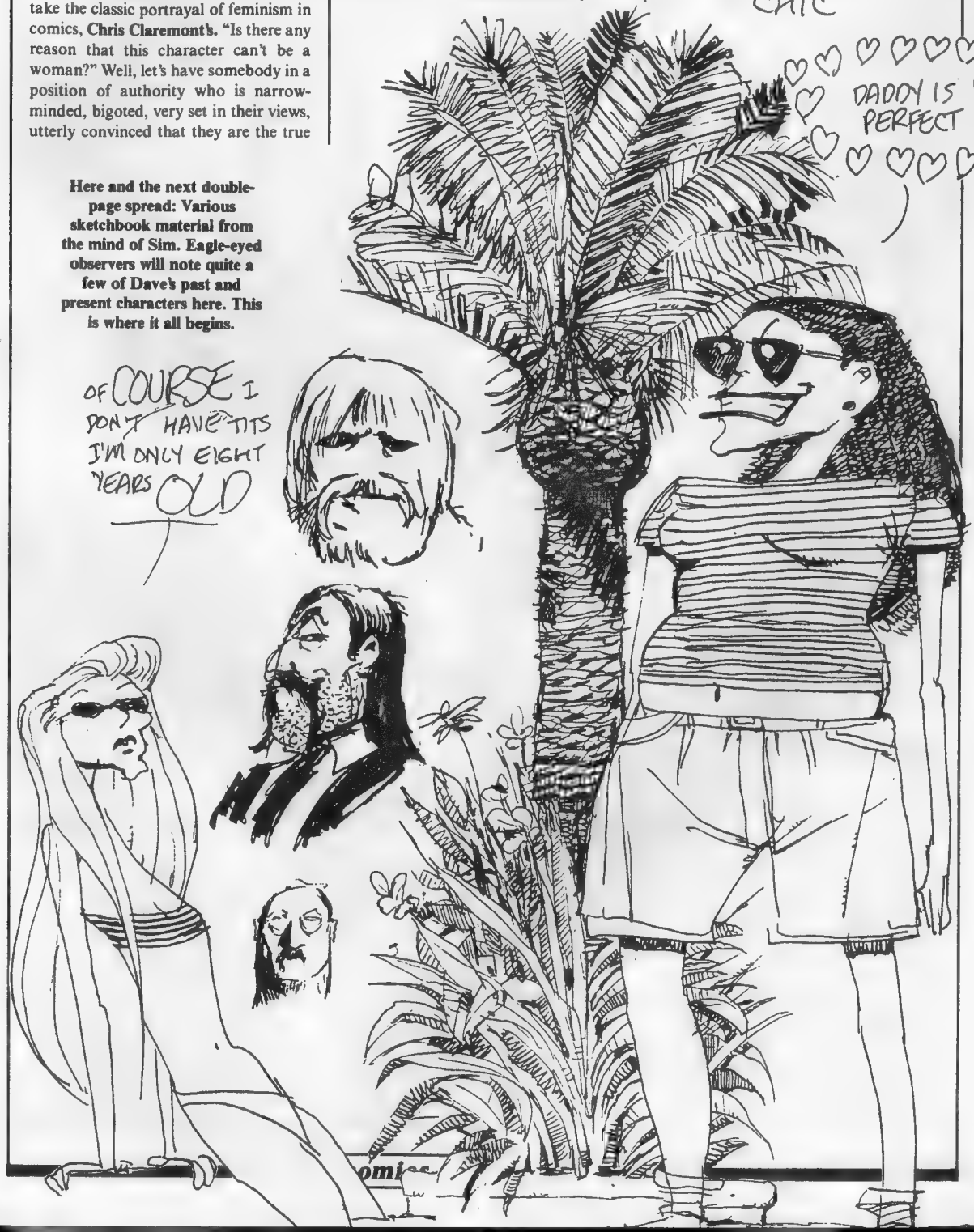
The theme of an occupying military force was consciously made in an intrinsic element of JAKA'S STORY and MELMOTH — JAKA'S STORY being Love and MELMOTH being Death. Those are two elements you have with *any* occupying force. That's something I wanted to document thoroughly. So much of our history is filled with people who don't belong somewhere going in and belonging there and creating death and being a death-like presence but always convincing themselves that it's an act of love. The occupation of Germany. You are not there by invitation, but nobody occupies a country thinking, "Boy, we can go to town now and be, like, right bastards." It's always with the construct and with the self-deception that it's "for their own good." Basically, Canada still occupies Quebec. Quebec was a separate nation, New France, one of the largest areas of French North America. Just because they lost a war, doesn't mean that they suddenly realized that they were no good and that they'd be so much better off under English rule. We are paying the price for that now, that universal misapprehension that because you won a war and silenced your opposition, that you now don't *have* any opposition.

And also MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS is having fun with the whole feminism thing. If you are going to argue that women can do anything that men can do, then women can be soldiers. Well, basically (I thought) let's take a *look* at some female soldiers. What happens if you have a matriarchy that survives into an industrial age and has one of the best armies? Let's really do it here, not only are the Cirinists soldiers, but they are the *best* soldiers. You just don't dick around with these broads. It's very strange to see the reaction to that, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not doing anything *wrong*. I'm making them *really*

circular motion. It's a rapid rotation just before bye-bye."

good soldiers. This is what really good soldiers are like. They are not nurturing and caring and know how to cooperate — that's not a soldier's job. The initial occupation forces in Germany after 1945 were not nurturing, caring, happy German-loving people. They were bitter conquerors. If we are going to discuss this, let's discuss what it's *really* like; let's take the classic portrayal of feminism in comics, **Chris Claremont's.** "Is there any reason that this character can't be a woman?" Well, let's have somebody in a position of authority who is narrow-minded, bigoted, very set in their views, utterly convinced that they are the true arbiter of reality and nobody else comes close. Let's make it **Margaret Thatcher.** The instant knee-jerk feminist response is, "Well, she's not a feminist. **Margaret Thatcher** is not a feminist, she's never done anything for women." My reaction is, "Well, what do you *think* is going to happen to any person given power?" I don't look at **Brian Mulroney** and **George Bush** and go, "Wow, one of us white males made it, now they'll help me!" They're no more one of "us" than **Margaret Thatcher** is one of what anybody would like to think of as "us."

Here and the next double-page spread: Various sketchbook material from the mind of Sim. Eagle-eyed observers will note quite a few of Dave's past and present characters here. This is where it all begins.



"Cerebus is one of those people who, if there *is*

All I'm saying is, if you think that somebody holding power, by the means that you need to use to hold power is going to be more attractive, or more sensible, or more easily dealt with because they're a woman, then I think you don't understand power. I can understand somebody saying I don't understand women, but I can definitely counter that in my own mind by saying you don't understand power and the people who are drawn to it.

STEVE: *Well, let's end with this question: Given that, what is Cerebus? Is he your surrogate, is he your image of a hero, what is Cerebus to Dave Sim and what do you want Cerebus to be to other people — or do you even think of him in that way?*

DAVE: It's very difficult, because he is obviously very complicated at this point. He is like a friend that I have had for 14 years, but I don't especially like. There are certainly times that the character does things that I don't like at all. But they are definitely part of his character. I know Cerebus' character at this point. Certainly, he's got a lot of my negative traits. I put them into his personality and they are often exaggerated or caricatured elements that I don't like in myself. Things I've noticed in myself that I feel that I've corrected over time or bad psychic baggage I'm still carrying around. It's always interesting to do a character who is laboring away at faults. There *are* major differences. Cerebus does not learn. I find that a very common trait, but it's not a trait that I see in myself to

reincarnation, he's got a lot of lifetimes to go."

any great extent — I do pride myself on the fact that I learn from my mistakes. I try very hard not to kid myself that everybody is against me or give in to paranoia. Cerebus is far more like **Richard Nixon** than me in that way. It's *never* his fault, he *never* did anything wrong. It's just that people don't understand or they are out to get him. In that sense, he's not really a surrogate.

STEVE: *Is he a hero? What makes him the center of this universe?*

DAVE: Well, because his name's on the cover! I know that sounds a little glib, but it is one of the centerpieces of it — it is his name on the cover. He's got severe limitations. He's one of those people who, if there *is* reincarnation, he's got a lot of lifetimes to go. He probably struggled to reach *this* point. He's probably taken 15 lifetimes of controlling his temper to get to this point and he's rapidly undoing whatever progress he's made. He's going to tumble all the way back down again. That does tend to make him a little cranky in an overall cosmic sense. Inside, he *knows*, "We're not making any real progress here, are we?" He's just got to muddle along and hope that the story ends soon and he doesn't come back as a rutabaga.

STEVE: *Well, Dave, I hope you don't come back as a rutabaga.*

DAVE: I wouldn't mind. It sounds a lot more relaxing than doing a monthly comic book.

STEVE: *Well, you could work for Marvel then.*

DAVE: You said that. I didn't.

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"Because it's there, I feel that I have to

LO! THE LETTERHACKS!

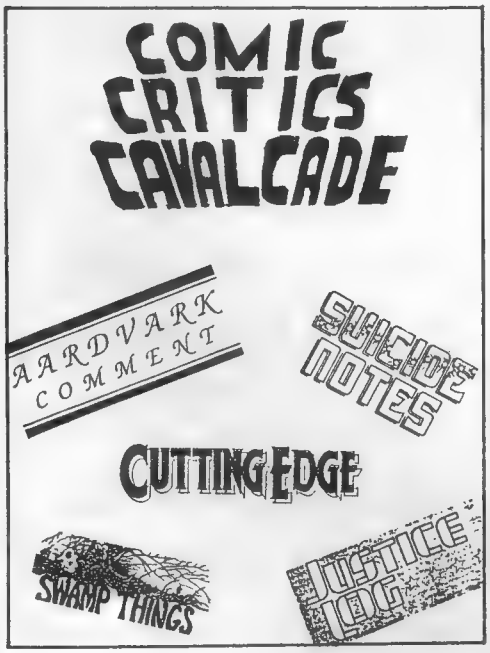
Letterhack panel/1991 San Diego Con. Left to right: Elizabeth Holden, Malcolm Bourne, Mark Lucas, Charles Novinskie.

Their names are as familiar as the characters whose books they appear in — they're the letterhacks!

They come from all walks of life from across the globe. And, over the years — thanks to fandom — these prolific writers have become much more than familiar names on letter pages, they have become friends.

It was my privilege to arrange for us all to gather for this interview at the 1991 San Diego Comic Convention. For the second year in a row, the fine folks at the San Diego Con permitted us to hold a public forum for letterhacks in the form of a one-hour Letterhack Panel. Afterwards, we all settled down for the interview you are about to read.

We were a very eclectic group. Elizabeth Holden made the trek from Canada; Mark Lucas from the Los Angeles area; Malcolm Bourne from clear across the Atlantic; and myself from the mountains of Colorado. And yet, we all shared a common interest, our love of comics and our desire to share that love through the letters pages. It was incredible to think that the four of us seated at that one table had accounted



unleash my creativity and madness on people."

for thousands of letters seeing print over the years. I shudder to think of the actual number of letters written!

In this time of mass media it's refreshing to be able to say that this is an interview that has never been done before. I hope everyone enjoys what follows and that it gives some insight into the people behind all of those letters . . .

CHARLES NOVINSKIE: *The first question I have to ask is — why?*

ELIZABETH HOLDEN: Because it's fun! It's always been fun and it continues to be fun; the day it's not fun is the day I'll stop doing it.

MALCOLM BOURNE: I enjoy doing it — and it's nice to be doing something creative. I also have a genuine desire to think about and write about the comics I read.

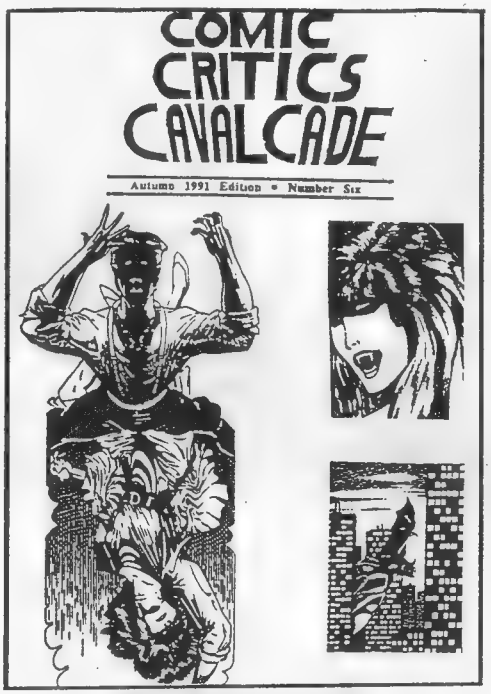
MARK LUCAS: Because it's there. I have to unleash my creativity and madness somewhere on people.

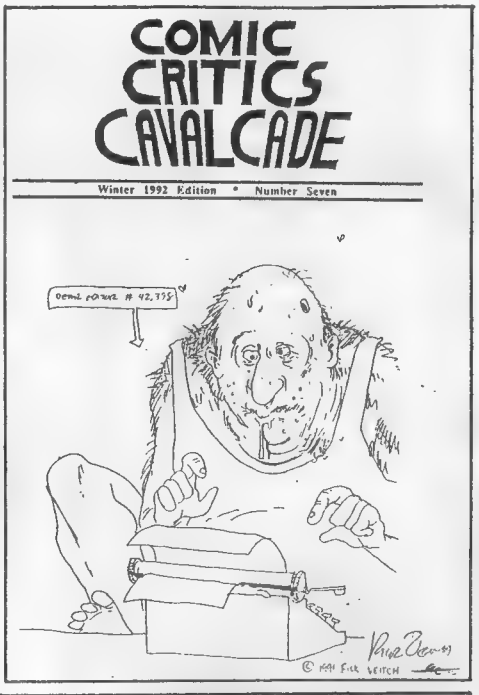
CHARLES: *What inspired you to write that first letter?*

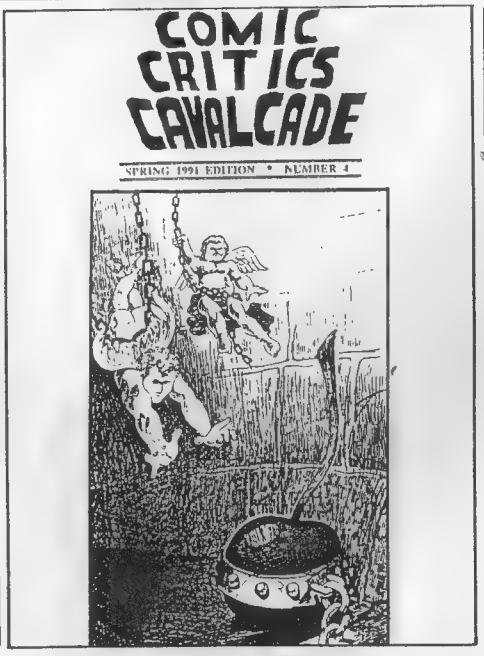
MALCOLM: One of the first independent comics I ever read, I really liked. That book was JON SABLE and it was different enough that I wanted to write and tell them that.

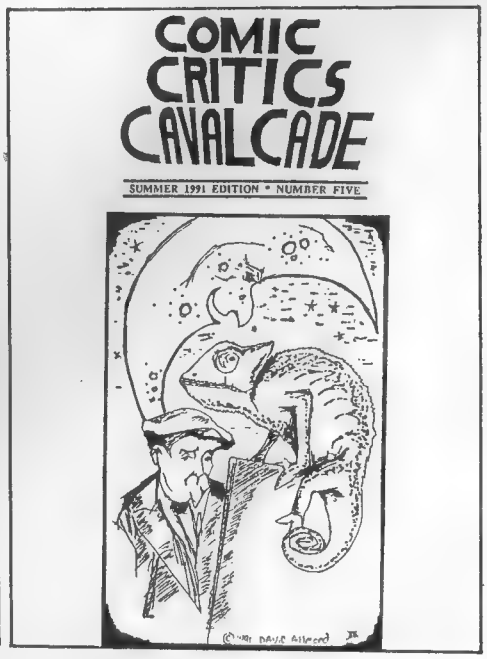
ELIZABETH: The first book I ever wrote to was FANTASTIC FOUR. After a long run of stories with villains

C.C.C. is a fanzine by and for letterhacks, co-produced by Lucas and Bourne.









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"The hacking I've been doing recently has been stuff I've

the like of Doctor Doom, the book had a new villain in it; the story just sort of caught my fancy so I wrote a letter to the editor. Whenever I read a very simple or very pointless letter that sounds like it was written by a ten-year-old, I remember my first letter when *I* was ten years old, and I think, "Well, OK, they perhaps have a future ahead of them."

MARK: In the mid-'80s, there was a comic, 'MAZING MAN, that I thought was really special. I never wrote to it — and it was cancelled. Maybe letters could have saved the book. The next title I found that spoke to me, I knew I had to write to; that book was THE QUESTION. That's how it started.

ELIZABETH: Too bad you couldn't have saved both 'MAZING MAN and THE QUESTION!

MALCOLM: THE QUESTION is still going . . .

ELIZABETH: It's still going quarterly. And it's only quarterly taken in the very loosest sense of the word.

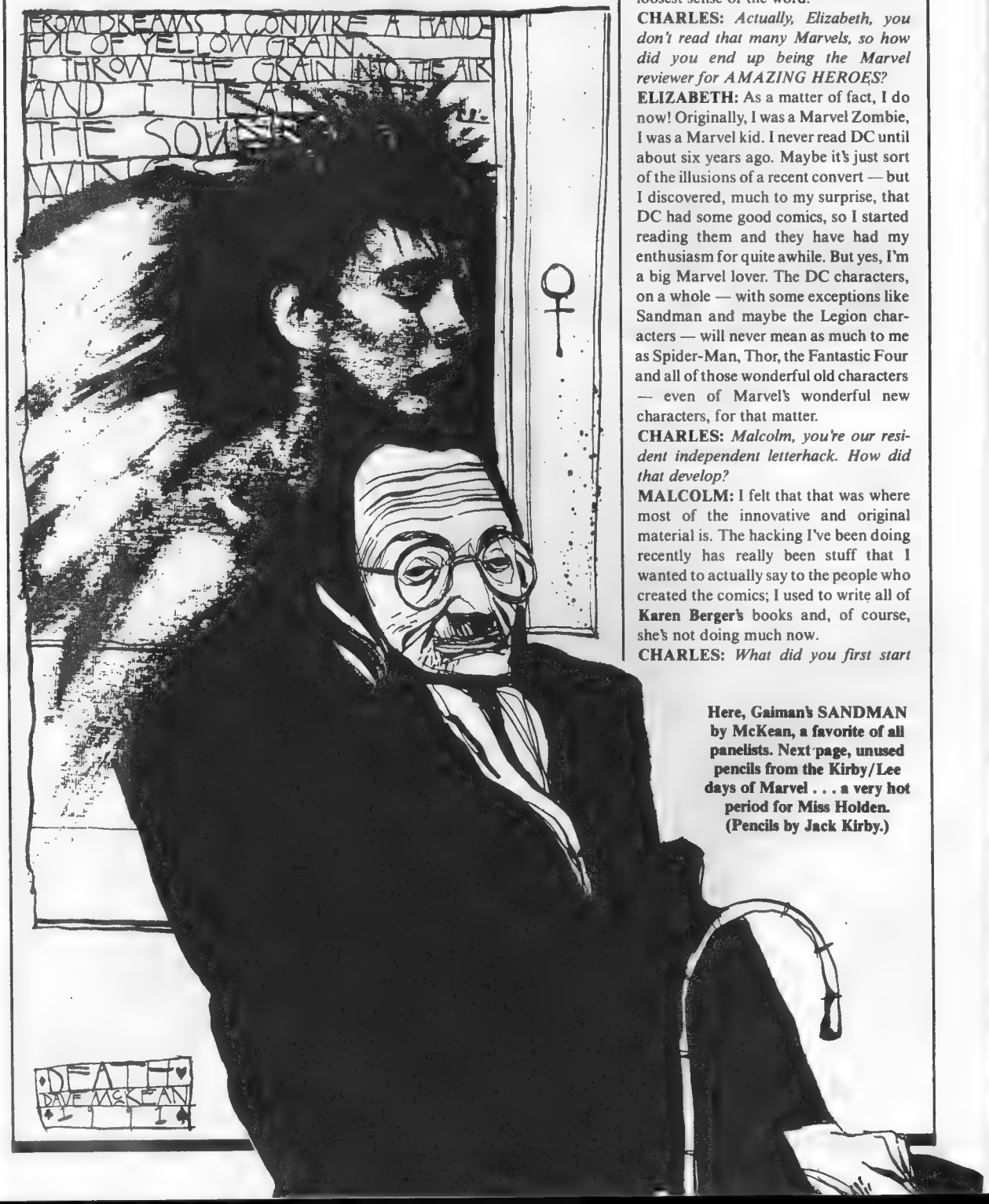
CHARLES: *Actually, Elizabeth, you don't read that many Marvels, so how did you end up being the Marvel reviewer for AMAZING HEROES?*

ELIZABETH: As a matter of fact, I do now! Originally, I was a Marvel Zombie, I was a Marvel kid. I never read DC until about six years ago. Maybe it's just sort of the illusions of a recent convert — but I discovered, much to my surprise, that DC had some good comics, so I started reading them and they have had my enthusiasm for quite awhile. But yes, I'm a big Marvel lover. The DC characters, on a whole — with some exceptions like Sandman and maybe the Legion characters — will never mean as much to me as Spider-Man, Thor, the Fantastic Four and all of those wonderful old characters — even of Marvel's wonderful new characters, for that matter.

CHARLES: *Malcolm, you're our resident independent letterhack. How did that develop?*

MALCOLM: I felt that that was where most of the innovative and original material is. The hacking I've been doing recently has really been stuff that I wanted to actually say to the people who created the comics; I used to write all of **Karen Berger's** books and, of course, she's not doing much now.

CHARLES: *What did you first start*



Here, Gaiman's SANDMAN by McKean, a favorite of all panelists. Next page, unused pencils from the Kirby/Lee days of Marvel . . . a very hot period for Miss Holden. (Pencils by Jack Kirby.)

wanted to say to the people who created the comics."

reading — and when?

MALCOLM: I started reading when I was thirteen and I remember the May 1975 cover date Marvels that I found in Manchester. For four years, they were all I read. I then went abroad for a year and then went to college, and somebody made me read the first LEGION ANNUAL. At about that time, the independent market was just getting started, and a friend of mine in college, **Nigel Fletcher,** was into these things and it took off from there. I've been completely addicted to independents ever since!

CHARLES: *It seems that you have the most name recognition of all the letterhacks at the conventions. Do you feel that is because the conventions are attended by an older audience, which makes up the larger share of independent readers?*

MALCOLM: I think so, to a certain extent — also because I'm English and I'm at an American convention.

CHARLES: *Being English, everyone thinks you write for DC.* (Laughter.)

MARK: And "Malcolm Bourne" sounds so regal . . .

MALCOLM: Exactly! *(Laughter.)* I've been to the San Diego Con twice now and for some reason everyone who meets me thinks that I'm going to be a lot older and a lot fatter.

ELIZABETH: Nobody who lives in a place called Ramsbottom can sound regal! *(More laughter.)*

CHARLES: *And then, of course, we have Mark — known for his letters to DC comics. Is it true that you've never read a Marvel comic?* (Laughter.)

MARK: Actually, I started buying comics when I was five or so and I bought everything.

ELIZABETH: You must have been a rich five-year-old!

MARK: Well, I didn't buy that much. I bought everything, Marvel, Harvey, DC.

"I don't want Gaiman to change SANDMAN for me."

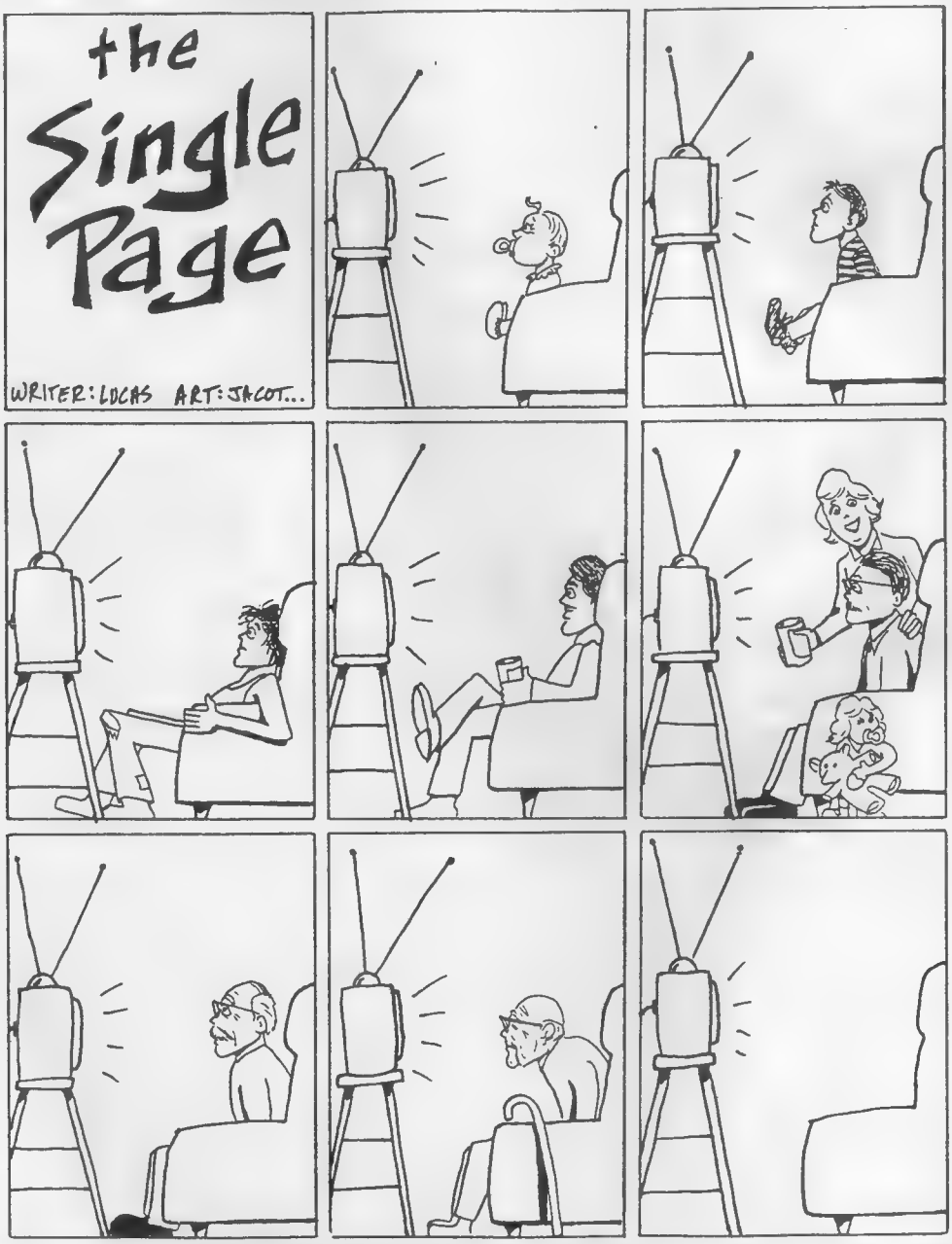
I really liked the 100-page Super Spectaculars by DC. I really felt like I was getting quite a bit for my money. Over the years, I gravitated towards Marvel and then, later on, towards DC. I read a little of everything now. I letterhack mainly to DC because I feel that my comments will influence their books a lot more. With Marvel, they don't care what you say; with independents, for the most part, the creator has a vision of what he wants to do and no one is going to change that.

MALCOLM: I'd like to note that I don't write to influence books, but rather to communicate with the creators and to let them know what I think; I feel that storylines as a whole are not something I should be trying to influence. The only time I have tried to influence a book is when I feel that someone is doing something that is morally or ethically wrong. For example, I have very strong views about mixing sex and violence in comics and the impressions that that can create for younger readers. I don't want **Neil Gaiman** to change SANDMAN for me.

ELIZABETH: Generally, I think books are best when the writer has a strong sense of direction and I like to know that I *can't* influence the writer.

MARK: I also use my letters as a way to urge someone to continue with something that I really enjoy. Writers are extremely isolated and I think that they need these letters telling them that they are on the right track.

ELIZABETH: I think too that, because I am a female reader and a writer and in a minority, that the writers, who are usually men, don't know when they're



One of Mark Lucas's illustrated one-pagers, as illustrated by Jacot.

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- ( ) Fan
- ( ) Game(PBM) Moderator
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- ( ) Darkover
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- ( ) Doctor Who
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- ( ) Dungeons & Dragons
- ( ) EC Comics
- ( ) Elfquest
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- ( ) Fantasy
- ( ) Fanzines
- ( ) Filking
- ( ) Films
- ( ) Foreign Comics
- ( ) Foreign Video/TV
- ( ) Funny Animals
- ( ) Gold Key Comics
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- ( ) Robert Heinlein
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- ( ) Humor
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- ( ) Models/Miniatures
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- ( ) Paperbacks
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- ( ) Star Wars
- ( ) Storage Supplies
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- ( ) Jack Vance
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- ( ) Other:_____

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Company/Organization | Year of Birth

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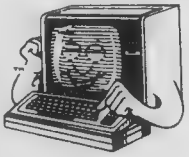

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"I received a booklet on how to get out of straitjackets."

doing a good job with the female characters. I've gotten a lot of comments from writers saying that they appreciate my comments concerning the way in which they handle the female characters. Not just sexism things but as far as how believable they portray female characters.

MARK: Oddly enough, I do that with minorities — especially EL DIABLO. You don't see many Hispanic characters. You don't see that many realistic black characters. When I do see one, I really encourage them — and I think that's important. If they're doing a good job with minority characters and no one lets them know they're doing a good job, they may not do more of it.

CHARLES: *Changing the subject, one of the pitfalls of having so many letters printed is the fact that a lot of people have access to our mailing addresses and it creates some strange mail. I'm curious to hear some of your experiences.*

ELIZABETH: I once received an ad for a booklet about how to get out of straitjackets.

MARK: I've gotten that one, also!

CHARLES: *I must admit that I've never received a letter from anyone in Nigeria.*

ELIZABETH: You can have *my* letters from Nigeria. *(Laughter.)*

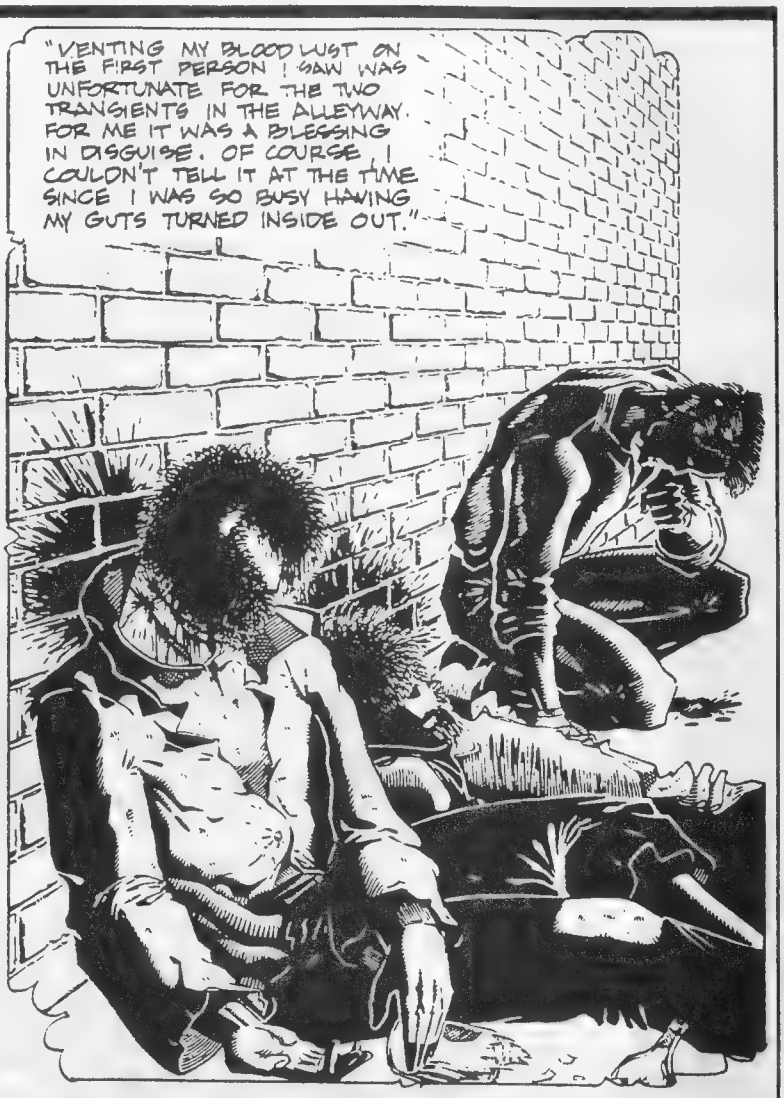
MALCOLM: Apparently, a bunch of Eclipse books were distributed in Nigeria, four or five years ago. I received a letter from a guy in Nigeria asking me to send him airfare so he could come and be a houseboy in my house. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: I once received a straightforward hate letter saying that they were tired of seeing my name all over. I also received, from England, two pages of **Grant Morrison's** NEW ADVENTURES OF HITLER and, on the outside of the envelope, were devil-worshiper markings. I'm not sure if Grant sent it as a joke or if some sick fan sent it. For all I know, Malcolm sent it to me. *(Laughter.)*

ELIZABETH: Actually, the strangest letter I've ever received came two days ago, and was from some guy in prison, who thinks I'm the girl of his dreams.

CHARLES: *As a whole, do you feel that we, as some of the more prolific letterhacks, influence other readers?*

MALCOLM: I don't think we influence them a great deal, in terms of what they might like or not like, but I think that we pick up on things that other readers might not pick up on. Not that we're better than other people — just that, when we write as many letters as we have, we tend to see different things in books that other readers might not.


"VENTING MY BLOOD LUST ON THE FIRST PERSON I SAW WAS UNFORTUNATE FOR THE TWO TRANSIENTS IN THE ALLEYWAY. FOR ME IT WAS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE. OF COURSE, I COULDN'T TELL IT AT THE TIME SINCE I WAS SO BUSY HAVING MY GUTS TURNED INSIDE OUT."

Panel from THE GIFT, by Novinskie with art and lettering by Alex Garner and Lon Roberts, respectively.

MARK: We also tend to stimulate dialogue and encourage people to think in letter columns. It's important to continue that dialogue rather than to just say that it was a great book, period.

CHARLES: *Who has the best letter columns in the industry?*

MARK: I think we'll all agree on this one. Definitely **Karen Berger's** books, SANDMAN, SHADE.

ELIZABETH: Generally, good comics have good letter columns.

MALCOLM: It's not only that, because it depends on the editor or the person that does the letter columns. I think that it is important for letter columns to have letters that have something to say and are interesting to read — some good comics don't do that so much and some do.

ELIZABETH: Dark Horse tends to have good letter columns.

MALCOLM: I'll certainly agree with that.

MARK: I have a problem with Eclipse letter columns. They can and do have interesting letter columns, but the editorial policy is such that it takes the letters page off into a political direction. The editor tends to start in on a thesis on whatever they're talking about. MIRACLEMAN and DIRTY PAIR are examples. Someone made a nice, little, innocent comment, and they took it off into a page and a half discussion; I feel that type of editorializing is inappropriate.

ELIZABETH: I've noticed that ZOT! has a very good letters column.

MALCOLM: Yes, and **Scott McCloud**

"It would be nice if writers did their own letter columns."

does that one. And they have all of those homophobic letters from **David Malcolm Porta.** I've only ever twice written to someone because I was annoyed about what they said. I wrote to him because he had said how terrible it was that Scott had condoned homosexuality. He wrote back with a six-page letter and I better not paraphrase what it said because it would offend people.

MARK: — do you think it's better when the writer takes over the letter columns?

MALCOLM: Yes!

MARK: Even if it's, say — a DC book?

MALCOLM: I don't know if it's necessarily better or worse, just more interesting. It depends what you're talking about. My impression of the DC books I've written to is that the editors are interested in having thoughtful letter columns, so they're doing very good letter columns. The book I'm doing for Dark Horse, if it has a letters column, I hope that I will be doing it; there's less point in my editor doing the letters page. Sorry **Barbara Kesel,** I guess there *is* a point — but what I'm saying is that if there is a letter about the content of the story, I want to talk to people about it. I would guess the reason that most writers don't do their own letter columns is logistical problems, since the letters are sent to the company. **Neil Gaiman** said he always got my letters three or four months late.

ELIZABETH: A recent case in point was when Neil was answering the letters in SANDMAN — and it was really fun.

MALCOLM: Ideally, it would be nice if the writers could all do their own letter columns. Of course, it depends — what about the letters that just talk about the art? In that case, the writer isn't the best person to comment about that particular letter!

CHARLES: *Does the constant writing of letters serve as a stimulus to move on to other forms of writing? Is writing contagious; the more you write the more you want to do?*

MALCOLM: I think that's true. It's fun being creative, isn't it?

ELIZABETH: I think it's one aspect of a person's personality. If they're

Malcolm's first pro job for Dark Horse: "Tales of Ordinary Madness." Art: Michael Dalton.

"Try it... It's really not that bad."
SCOTT RUSS'S
JIZZ
PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY BY FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

"The contact between the fans and the creators through

going to write letters, they're obviously articulate people that already are full of ideas, and they will therefore develop in different directions. Whether or not they stop being letterhacks is pretty much irrelevant.

MARK: I find that letterhacking allows a person to build upon the experience and to discover different outlets and new avenues. Maybe first letterhacking, then apas, then fanzines, pro work, whatever.

CHARLES: *I can safely say that if not for letterhacking all of us seated at this table wouldn't have even known about apas (amateur press associations).*

ELIZABETH: And now we're all involved in a variety of apas!

MALCOLM: Only a small minority of readers write letters — which means that writing letters requires a bit of creativity and motivation. Those of us doing it regularly do tend to build up this desire to want to do more, so it's natural to move on to other things.

CHARLES: *In Malcolm's case, now that you have a mini-series of your own due out in January, I suppose you have to not only watch who you hack to — but what you say.*

MALCOLM: Well, yes, I don't think it would be polite for me to be criticizing people publicly at the same time as I'm trying to sell story proposals and get them out on the shelf. I would find it a bit awkward to have a book on the shelf, like SANDMAN, with a letter in it that I had written, next to a book that I had written.

CHARLES: *Is it difficult to write a letter of comment, from a creative standpoint, now that you're writing professionally?*

MALCOLM: No, not really, I've never had to force a letter. I find it a challenge to write what I have to say in the limited space I have to work with because I have so much to say.

CHARLES: *Elizabeth, you're writing reviews for AMAZING HEROES. How did that come about?*

ELIZABETH: Once again, through people in apas. When I mentioned to a friend who knew someone at AMAZING HEROES that I thought it would be great to be a reviewer, they passed my

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As Mark has said here, "C.C.C.: It's the ALTER EGO for the '90s." There are others who might say that it's somewhere between A.H. and A.E. Here are A.H. #83 by Guice and Layton; A.H. #77 by Gilbert, Loeb, Bissette and Totleben; also an ad for the first two ALTER EGOs by Roy Thomas (issues #10 and #11).

letters pages and conventions makes it a wonderful thing."

name on. They contacted me shortly thereafter and I can honestly say that I was delighted. I was for a time their Marvel reviewer, but currently have moved over to doing their DC reviews; not that I'd rather review DC over Marvel, but rather that I felt it was time for a change.

CHARLES: *Mark, your forte at present is fanzine writing, and you were voted Writer of the Year for CAPA-alpha.*

MARK: I hope to explore different outlets. I don't want to limit myself to letterhacking. I'm in two apas, I help produce other fanzines and have a "Single Page" coming out in CEREBUS: CHURCH AND STATE; I want to play my hand and see what's out there. I do reviews for SYN and I'm co-editing CCC with Malcolm; CCC is a fanzine, COMIC CRITICS CAVALCADE, and it's been out for nearly two years. It's produced by and for letterhacks and we discuss quite a bit of interesting material that we feel is pertinent to the industry. It's not just for letterhacks but anyone interested in the industry. You could say that it's the ALTER EGO for the '90s. I'm also sending out proposals. I'm having fun.

CHARLES: *Malcolm, now would be a good time to plug your first professional work.*

MALCOLM: Right, it's a four-issue series from Dark Horse, TALES OF ORDINARY MADNESS, written by myself and drawn by **Michael Dalton Allred** (GRAFIK MUZIK). **John Bolton** will be painting our covers. It is a tale of mental illness from the point of view coming from the people with the illness. It is also about the differences between ill people and well people, and how they react to different situations. I'm really looking forward to it. It's nice to be able to start off with a creator-owned book and I have a wonderful editor, **Barbara Kesel,** who hasn't tried to change anything. Any suggestions she's had have been made with the comment that it's my book and I can do whatever I want.

CHARLES: *Elizabeth, your future plans?*

ELIZABETH: I'm doing quite a bit. I'm working on writing a novel and I'm also in a horrendous number of apas at the moment.

CHARLES: *Malcolm, did your being noted as an indy letterhack have any bearing on selling your series to Dark Horse?*

MALCOLM: Indirectly; when I came up with my first series proposal, I took it to all of the independents, because I wanted to do a creator-owned book. The fact that my name was known was an advantage. Not in getting something published, as such, but I thought that I could go up to these people and they would know me. I think the fact that these people knew of me helped get my proposal looked at. The fact that they recognized my name and that I could walk up to them at a convention and have them look at my stuff — as opposed to sending in an unsolicited submission — helped. The name recognition alone wouldn't have gotten my piece published, if it wasn't good enough to be published.

CHARLES: *To wrap things up, any words of wisdom to the future letterhacks out there?*

ELIZABETH: Do it and have fun doing it.

MARK: And don't write letters to see them in print. Write them to help out the book or the creative team. Don't expect them to see print and — when they do — consider that one of the perks of letterhacking.

MALCOLM: It's a great thing to do and a very nice way to get involved in comics. It makes comics a unique medium. The contact between the fans and the creators through letters pages and conventions makes it a wonderful thing and, in some cases, a good way to work your way into the industry.

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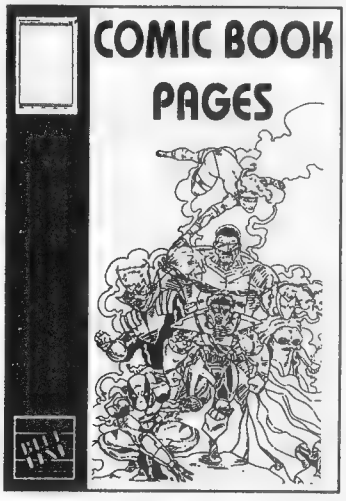

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LAST WORD

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THIS BLOODY INDUSTRY

Dear Dave,

Please pardon this somewhat tardy reply to the appeal for info that you published in COMICS INTERVIEW #100, but then, you did think of me *last*, after **Les Daniels** and **Don Rosa.** Of course, I shouldn't hold that against you, since *everyone* has thought of me last, if at all, for all the years you've known me. In fact, most recently, I was forgotten when the credits were put on the big new MARVEL history book: a book which not only contained rare material from my archive, but moreover, a book I could've done almost entirely on my own, had the right people assigned the job to me before **Brad Eliot** was commissioned, let alone **Les Daniels** (with all due respect to Les, whose comicological writing has long commanded my respect).

Now, with regard to **J. Shingler's** query about a '60s men's mag featuring **Stan Lee, Jack Kirby,** and a naked woman whom **J. Shingler** associated with **Flo Steinberg,** my research cannot be complete at this time, due to my forced relocation to Florida in the wake of the fire that devastated much of Chamber Of Fantasy North, but I've done something anyway. I have a lot of material, as you know, but no such mag has ever come to my attention. I never saw anything involving Stan, Jack, and Flo/naked woman in any of the Magazine Management racy cartoon mags, which printed and reprinted several of those well-rendered "Pussycat" strips by the likes of **Jim Mooney** and **Bill Everett** in-betwixt those silly little gag cartoons. Then, I thought of those two issues of ESQUIRE (which, according to my dad, was once considered a "men's magazine," albeit back in those ancient days when people like **Alberto Vargas** were rendering those alluring women with chisels on stone pages), Sept. issues from 1965 and '66, I believe, which feature some nifty pics and info about Marvel's impact on the college campuses. However, I don't recall our two leaders posing with Flo and/or any nude.

Onwards, now, to the mile-long-missive of the very literate and intellectual **Cat Yronwode,** whose letters to Marvel kept us quite busy back in our staff days, 'ey Dave? (And as for **Paul Power** to **Kim Thompson:** great headline).

I'm not going to attempt to respond to her letter point by point, but I will give my reaction to the overall feeling of her criticism of the "Power List" idea. While the concept doesn't offend me in and of itself, since I like to learn all kinds of things, nevertheless, I too am opposed to the greedy quest for power at any cost, in addition to the fact that I'm opposed to power in the hands of the unjust and cruel. That Catherine feels that such ruthless characters have no control over her and her employees is fine, and if she's an ethical and otherwise nice person (and I am grateful to both Cat and Dean for past kindnesses bestowed upon me by them), I am sad to point out that not everyone at Eclipse seems quite up to those standards of behavioral excellence, for I'm reminded that when my freelance and staff work queries went out to Eclipse for a second time, after my outlines were first lost in their flood, years back, I received no response, even though I was a fellow pro (not *fan:* PRO) of some accomplishment, by that time. On the other hand, their new editor, to whom I directed my material at the instruction of Dean, saw to it that his own work got into print, and otherwise advanced his own ends.

This kind of thing runs rampant throughout this bloody industry. I've been a victim of it countless times. I had my career severely impaired from square one by people whose names are admired by countless fans. I've gone from having a promising beginning by way of **Stan Lee's** recommendation, in 1976, through a crummy staff job where I was politically bullied when I wasn't being used as an uncredited consultant, through what was a virtually unpaid, and certainly uncredited, freelance period doing research for a pal who was writing for Marvel's British Department, on through a year or so of pillar-to-post, hand-to-mouth freelancing (I wrote THE MARVEL COMICS POST CARD BOOK during that time), and into a two-year period of detailed historical research writing for Marvel, again, during the **Shooter** regime. That research project was ongoing, voluminous, and beyond the scope of the knowledge and data bases of virtually everyone associated with Marvel. The journalistic quality of some of my reports was complimented by an experienced radio newsman. Nevertheless, my pay rate from **Shooter** (a man praised for his "championship" of financial equity and creator's rights) was far below that of other company writers, who could not do my work, though I'm sure I could've done theirs. I was not made privy to, let alone part of, the bonus incentive plan for long runs of consecutive written works. Furthermore, I never got credit for my work; at least, not publicly; and when the published MARVEL UNIVERSE work came along, or the recent MARVEL ... history book came along, I was all but forgotten. This convenient "amnesia" emerged almost every time anything good came open, except for the MARVEL AGE history series; and even that was impaired by terrible editing on the part of **Salicrup's** assistants, who, by the way, wanted to write that feature themselves. My unfair treatment has been chronic, most recently manifesting itself in my having been denied promised credit for rare material, from my archive, photographed for the big MARVEL history book.

What does all this mean, anyway? Am I just blowing my own horn, here? Does anyone out there know much about me (anyone under thirty, anyway)? Does anyone care? My first instinct was to answer, "no," but that wouldn't be entirely true, because there are several hundred folks in Brooklyn who do, or at least did, until my 1989 fire, which forced my relocation, and the period since, which has affected my health to a point so severe that I was hospitalized less than two weeks ago. My point, anyway, in terms of my own suffering, is that if this kind of thing can happen to me, it can happen to others (which it has), and that power, in and of itself, is not good, let alone admirable. The sentiment was marvelously expressed in the last panel of "Spider-Man," from AMAZING FANTASY #15: "With great power there must also come — great responsibility!" (My copy is at my side, open, as I write these important words.)

It is that great responsibility toward the logic and continuity of comics, the professional ethics that should govern

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

our industry, and, of course, the proper respect for the people who buy the products, that is in need of vast improvement, and must become of paramount importance to the so-called "power people," if their power is to have any *good* meaning to the rest of us.

Warren Reece
address withheld by request

ALL NUDE OUTTAKES

Dear Readers,

I interviewed **Nancy Collins** for COMICS INTERVIEW #102 and there's been an embarrassing mistake.

The original, unedited, taped interview with **Nancy Collins** contained dozens of jokes, some of which were somewhat suggestive, but in a nice way. We were borrowing NOSFS guest liaison's — **Susan Broccato's** — room for the interview (thank you, Susan!). During the course of the interview, a steady stream of con staff members came and went, changing in the tiny hotel bathroom behind me. I joked about it and Nancy, perhaps sensing an easy target, teased me about it.

The gag even went so far as to suggest we could call this THE ALL NUDE INTERVIEW SESSION WITH NANCY A. COLLINS. I twisted my brain for a great introduction and, replaying the tape several times, knew I wouldn't be able to pass up Nancy's offhand joke about this being an "All Nude" interview.

When I got the transcription back, the innuendo and most of the jokes had been deleted.

I realized that the new introduction and edited interview were better and filed it away as a lesson learned, silently thankful that DAK hadn't made a big deal out of it. I sent the transcription back with some red pencilling and waited to find out which issue my interview would be in.

I didn't learn of the mistake until I flipped to page 4 of issue #102. Very simply, the original and the new introductions had been combined! Horrors! The interview was preceded by the (nudge, nudge) all NUDE introduction.

I just want to apologize to one and all. I can only assume that I'm to blame for (1) including the silly introduction in the first place, (2) writing the introduction on the same paper with the notes to the transcriber (I'm assuming this is the most likely cause of the snafu), and (3) not double checking about the fate of the old introduction.

Bill Kieffer
308 Barton Ave.
Mt. Pleasant, NJ 08742

Your taking responsibility for what was, in fact, a puzzling series of goofs by any number of parties, is refreshing, Bill — but unnecessary. The captain of the ship is responsible for the actions of the entire crew, and so as you can see the blame is mine. However, there's a saying — "worse things happen at sea" — and thankfully, this is a minor misfortune and not a major disaster. Take heart — never take umbrage — and we'll all be looking forward to your future interviews, Bill!

— DAK

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (404) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

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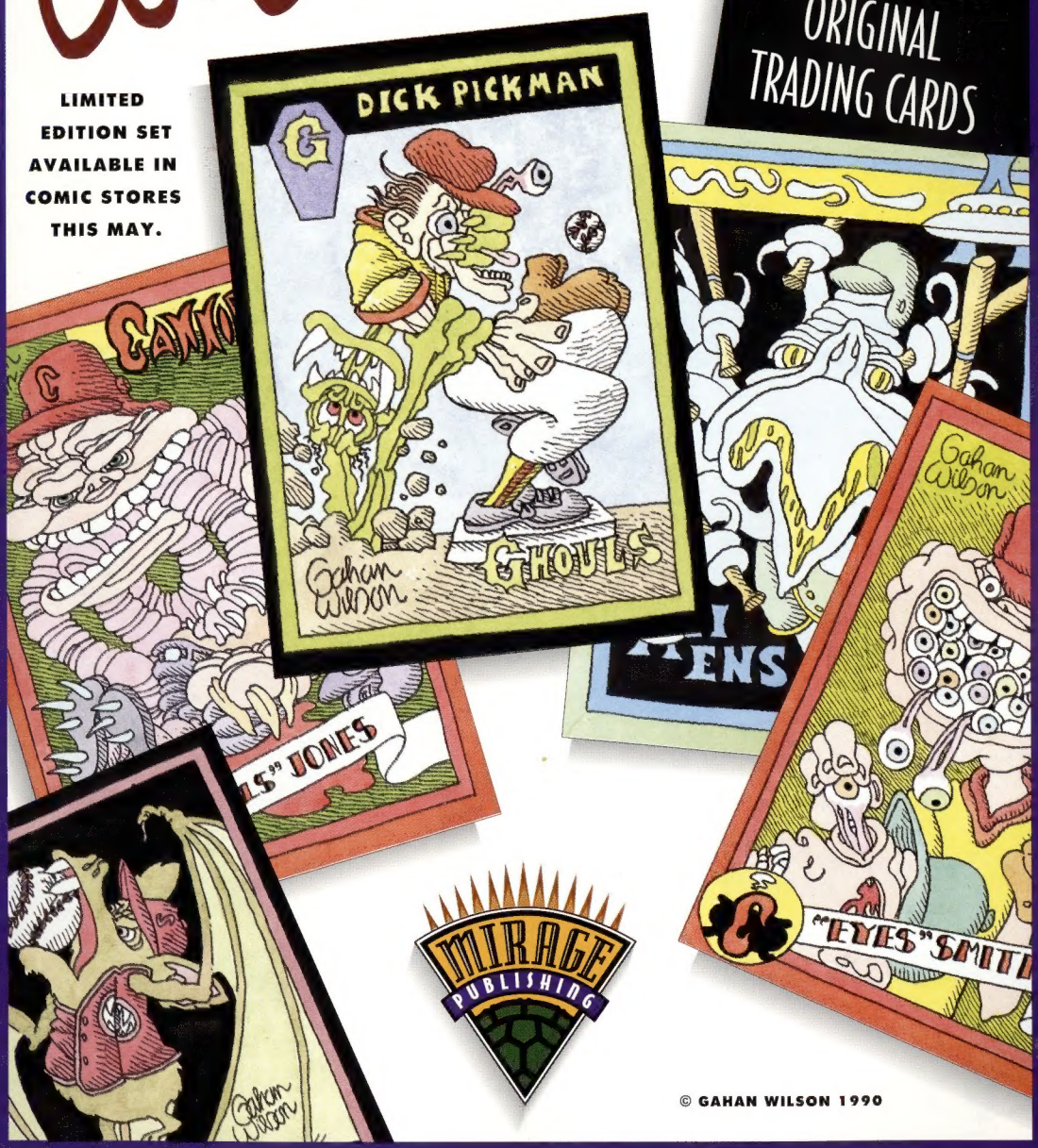

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